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Voices of Nothing: Aesthetics of Corruption in Music and Language

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M.A., University of Western Ontario, 2013

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Abstract

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This project explores how discourses of decadence and corruption manifest in the history and aesthetics of opera. In doing so, it examines various philosophical claims about the purity of operatic expressiveness, and analyzes how such claims of purity are produced alongside aesthetic figures of corruption to which they are inextricably bound. These figures of corruption are analyzed in relation to the concept of a *vox nihili*—a typographical term naming a printer’s error mistakenly assumed to be meaningful. Using this term as a metaphor, this dissertation shows how theories of pure operatic expression are similarly perverted by the contingent effects of non-expressive structures that they are unable to eliminate—and thus how the supposed purity of the operatic voice gives way to a “voice of nothing.” From this perspective, Chapter 1 examines Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s debates with Jean-Philippe Rameau in the eighteenth century, in which Rousseau developed arguments about the corruption of modern operatic expressiveness. Chapter 2 addresses similar ideas of corruption and expression in the nineteenth-century confrontation between the German composer Richard Wagner and the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, reading these two artists in relationship to writing by Jacques Derrida. Chapters 3 and 4 then discuss how the philosophical questions outlined in the project’s first half are addressed in works by two twentieth-century composers—Arnold Schoenberg and Claude Vivier, respectively. Chapter 3 thus analyzes Schoenberg’s opera *Moses und Aron* and its dramatization of the corruption of a divine “idea,” and Chapter 4 examines how two operatic works by Vivier dramatize moments of loss and death drawn from his own biography. Over these four chapters, the dissertation demonstrates how figures of aesthetic corruption persist throughout the history of opera, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth; it also considers how such figures begin to take on moral and political dimensions.

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List of Abbreviations

CV	—	<i>Claude Vivier: A Composer's Life</i> , by Bob Gilmore
D	—	<i>Dissemination</i> , by Jacques Derrida
DG	—	<i>De la grammatologie</i> , by Jacques Derrida
DP	—	<i>Des dispositifs pulsionnels</i> , by Jean-François Lyotard
ECV	—	<i>Les Écrits de Claude Vivier</i> , by Claude Vivier
ET	—	<i>L'Écriture et le théâtre: Mallarmé/Artaud</i> , seminar by Jacques Derrida
KR	—	"Die Kunst und die Revolution," by Richard Wagner
KZ	—	"Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft," by Richard Wagner
MW	—	<i>Mallarmé and Wagner</i> , by Heath Lees
NGD	—	<i>New Grove Dictionary of Music</i>
OCB	—	Charles Baudelaire, <i>Oeuvres Complètes</i> (numbers indicate volume)
OCM	—	Stéphane Mallarmé, <i>Oeuvres Complètes</i> (numbers indicate volume)
OCR	—	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <i>Oeuvres Complètes</i> (numbers indicate volume)
OD	—	<i>Oper und Drama</i> , by Richard Wagner
SI	—	<i>Style and Idea</i> , by Arnold Schoenberg

*So you have swept me back,
I who could have walked with the live souls
above the earth,
I who could have slept among the live flowers
at last;*

*so for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I am swept back
where dead lichens drip
dead cinders upon moss of ash;*

*so for your arrogance
I am broken at last,
I who had lived unconscious,
who was almost forgot [...]*

H.D., from “Eurydice”

Introduction. *Vox Nihili*

*And, by the dog, without being aware of it, we've been
purifying the city we recently said was luxurious.
Plato, Republic, Book III, 399e*

[...] *the journey to corruption is, always, already, half over.*
James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (168)

Prelude: An Operatic Fable

The European project of *opera*—to take the Latin name seriously—performs a certain *operation*, an “activity, effort, labour, work.”¹ In its most modest form, this operation or this work might be defined as a theatrical unification of music with language. In practice, however, opera is rarely modest, and its stakes are often cast in far more histrionic and grandiose terms than any such formula. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, for instance, describes the operatic project in terms of two slightly more dramatic alternatives:

La Bruyere dit que l'*opéra* doit tenir l'esprit, les oreilles & les yeux dans une espece d'enchantement : & Saint-Evremond appelle l'*opéra* un *chimérique assemblage de poésie & de musique*, dans lequel le poëte et le musicien se donnent mutuellement la torture (“Opéra,” 11: 494).²

Opera will be thus either enchantment or torture, will either transfix the senses or collapse into their painful discord. It will be, in this sense, not only a genre of musical-theatrical performance, but also a staging of the effort to produce a form of immediate expression that is capable, at its best, of enchanting (*in-cantare*) the senses—and at its worst, of doing violence to them. From this perspective, aesthetic debates in the history of opera have often sought to ground it, either implicitly or explicitly, in different philosophical guarantees for the purity of its song, according

¹ From the Latin etymology of “Opera” offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

² See also Thomas, *Music and the Origins of Language: Theories from the French Enlightenment*, 147.

to which its musico-linguistic forms would be united in a necessary and non-arbitrary relationship with the feelings that they are meant to express or evoke (e.g. the Baroque Doctrine of the Affections, Jean-Philippe Rameau's neo-Pythagorean *corps sonore*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *unité de mélodie*, Richard Wagner's theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Arnold Schoenberg's Expressionism, etc.). Gary Tomlinson thus argues, in *Metaphysical Song*, that the history of opera is intimately bound up with developments in the history of philosophy, just as, several years prior, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe had similarly written—after Nietzsche, commenting on Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*³—that “[l]’opéra est l’opus *metaphysicum* par excellence” (*Pour n’en pas finir* 258).

This desire to reach a metaphysical purity of expression can be found at the very heart of opera, even in its founding myth or what Carolyn Abbate calls its primal scene⁴—namely, in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which played a central role at the outset of the artform, from Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* in 1600 (the earliest surviving opera) and Monteverdi's 1607 *L'Orfeo*, to Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1762 and Joseph Haydn's aptly named *L'anima del filosofo, ossia Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1791. In the first of these, Orpheus succeeds in retrieving his lover from the underworld, while in Monteverdi and Gluck he initially fails but is nevertheless redeemed through the literal appearance of *dei ex machina* (Apollo and Amore, respectively). Abbate notes that Striggio's libretto for *L'Orfeo* initially included Orpheus's tragic fate at the hands of the Bacchantes, though Monteverdi's final version leaves it out (*In Search of Opera* 2). Only later does Haydn finally allow Orpheus to fail, and even then only on certain

³ In his *Untimely Meditations*, the early Nietzsche describes *Tristan und Isolde* as das eigentliche opus metaphysicum aller Kunst [the actual opus metaphysicum of all art]” (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* 62). See also Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta* 39.

⁴ In *In Search of Opera*, Carolyn Abbate references “Possente spirito”—Orpheus's “big aria” in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*—as opera's primal scene (Abbate xv), and cites the death and decapitation of Orpheus as the “master symbol” of the “operatic cliché” of offstage, “disembodied” voices.

conditions.⁵ These rather suspicious tendencies in early opera—to protect the figure of Orpheus and to rewrite his story as successful or redeemable—may be said to function as operatic “screen memories,” such as Freud might have called them, covering over a more difficult moment of Orphic failure that underlies them: at the moment, in other words, when opera would attempt to philosophically justify the purity of its expression, when it would turn to face and reclaim the enchanted feeling it so desperately desires, this phantasy of immediacy would be corrupted, fade from view and fall back beyond the banks of the Lethe.

Before its uptake in opera, the Orpheus myth was of course most famously known through its Latin retellings by Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, Books X and XI) and Virgil (*Georgics*, Book IV)—though an even older and more severe version of the story can be found embedded within Plato’s *Symposium*. This version is offered in passing by the character Phaedrus, in the context of a larger discussion of the relationship between love and death:

But Orpheus, son of Oeagrus, they sent back with failure from Hades, showing him only a wraith of the woman for whom he came; her real self they would not bestow, for he was accounted to have gone upon a coward's quest, too like the minstrel that he was, and to have lacked the spirit to die as Alcestis did for the sake of love, when he contrived the means of entering Hades alive. Wherefore they laid upon him the penalty he deserved, and caused him to meet his death at the hands of women (179d-179e⁶).

Phaedrus here describes the loss of Eurydice as a foregone conclusion. According to his version of the story, Orpheus is a cowardly schemer who lacks the courage to die for his love, and who

⁵ Haydn’s incredible version of the myth (as written by Carlo Francesco Badini) finally has Orpheus fail in his quest, and die at the hands of the Bacchantes, but as Abbate observes, even this retelling tempers Orpheus’s fate and punishes his murderers: “[the] singing Bacchantes force Orpheus to drink poison; his life ‘ebbs away’ rather languidly, and his corpse remains intact. The Bacchantes are punished when a storm disperses them: a fitting end for such women, we are given to understand” (*In Search of Opera* 2).

⁶ Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925.

therefore attempts instead to enter Hades alive, planning to use his expressive voice and the chords of his kithara to cheat life back from death. As Plato puts it, rather unsurprisingly, such a “soft-hearted” character is typical of a musician (κιθαρωδός), and it is this musician’s cowardice that leads the gods to show Orpheus only “a wraith of the woman for whom he came.” There is no possibility for redemption in this version of the story: Eurydice only ever appears as a phantom or apparition (φάσμα), and Orpheus is “sent back with failure from Hades” (Plato says ἀτελῇ ἀπέπεμψαν, sent off without *telos*—unaccomplished but also endlessly and aimlessly).⁷

Slightly twisting the stakes of Plato’s retelling, this version of the Orpheus myth might also offer a commentary on the operatic project *avant la lettre*, on its desire to en-charm the senses of its listener and revivify them in an affective immediacy. To take Phaedrus at his word, such a task will have been doomed from the start: opera’s desired expressiveness will be found to be only ever a ghost, a phantasm or phantasy traversed by death and thus finally unable to be rescued. The Orphic desire, in other words, would ruin opera’s attempt to metaphysically ground the purity of its expression, which would run up against not only a failure, but the *a priori* necessity of this failure. Maurice Blanchot has already described the aporia that structures this failed desire in his famous essay, “Le Regard d’Orphée:”

Dans le chant seulement, Orphée a pouvoir sur Eurydice, mais, dans le chant aussi, Eurydice est déjà perdue et Orphée lui-même est l’Orphée dispersé, « infiniment mort » que la force du chant fait dès maintenant de lui. Il perd Eurydice, parce qu’il la desire par-delà les limites mesurées du chant, et il se perd lui-même, mais ce désir et Eurydice

⁷ Toward the beginning of his seminal text *La musique et l'ineffable* (in “Orphée ou les sirènes?”), Vladimir Jankélévitch dismisses this Platonic version of Orpheus (which he notes was later echoed by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*), preferring instead to juxtapose a pacifying Orphic song to the Sirens, whose music only ever misleads. I will retain this Platonic account of the myth, however, because of the way that it locates what Jankélévitch will call the Siren *within* the figure of Orpheus, thus displacing any easily distinguishable opposition of genuine and false expression (even if, of course, Plato himself aims at nothing if not to purge oneself of falsity).

perdue et Orphée dispersé sont nécessaires au chant, comme est nécessaire à l'oeuvre l'épreuve du désœuvrement éternel (*L'espace littéraire* 227-228).

Blanchot's *désœuvrement* would thus describe what remains *inoperable* within opera. The unmediated vitality sought in its song-work will remain pervaded by the death of which it had wanted to purify itself.

Emerging alone from Hades, then, Orpheus's music will have failed not only to reverse death, but *will have been corrupted by it*: and so he himself will be later attacked and torn apart by the Bacchantes, no longer able to shield (his) life in song. In this sense, for Ovid, death will correspond precisely to the inexpressiveness of the voice, at the moment when Orpheus "for the first time spoke words without effect; / for the first time his voice did not *enchant* [*illo tempore primùm / Irrita dicentem, nec quicquam voce moventem*]" (Ovid 360; emphasis added).⁸

Disenchanted, his voice immediately lapses into the torturous alternative offered by Saint-Évremond: he is thus both disharmonized and dismembered,⁹ his song scattered with his limbs, head and lyre thrown into the Hebrus where they offer one last unnatural cry, reverberating (Virgil says *referebant*) along the riverbanks: "Eurydicen!" (*Georgics*, IV, ll. 525-528).¹⁰ This repetition of Orpheus's cry would also figure a more general aesthetic problem that confounds the operatic project's quest after enchantment—confronting it with an undead voice, only able to *refer to* and echo (*referre*) a phantasy and a memory of what it desired to express. Such a voice might be heard as a sign of life, though its source disappears under scrutiny, revealing itself to be but a mechanical reaction of the river, carrying across itself what has always been lost: a voice from nowhere, a voice of nothing.

⁸ Mandelbaum's translation is fortuitous (and fortunate).

⁹ Note the link between song and limb in the Greek μέλος.

¹⁰ See Chapter 1 of Abbate's *In Search of Opera*, which examines Orpheus's dismemberment, and particularly his disembodied head, as a symbol for a mediation between death and vitality in operatic performance.

1. *Vox Nihili*

Once able to enchant even Cerberus, though now shorn of its expression, crying out, the Orphic-operatic voice echoes from shore to shore as a voice of nothing, a kind of musical *vox nihili*. In its rhetorical and typographical senses, this term—also of Latin origin—generally describes “[a] word, or word form, which does not really exist, often being the result of an editorial misreading, scribal mistake, printing error, etc.” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “*vox nihili*”). The *Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Words in English* takes a slightly more colorful stance, writing that the term names “[a] worthless or meaningless word, *especially* one produced by a scribal or printer's error” (“*vox nihili*”). A *vox nihili*, then, would not simply name a scribal mistake itself, a typographical error to be corrected, but rather the threat and the possibility that such an error might be misrecognized as true, and that it might therefore begin to take on a ghostly life of its own. The sign one thought to be significant, to be ontologically stable, would evaporate into meaninglessness, worthlessness, accident, the psittacine repetition of that “which does not really exist,” the corruption of the living word by the (un)dead letter.

This threat of corruption—the fear, in other words, that expression might turn out in fact to be a voice of nothing—will be the subject of this dissertation. Rather than focusing on language alone, however, I will concentrate on cases from the history of the relation between language and music (as figured, for instance, in the Orphic-operatic voice with which I began), examining a more literal kind of *vox nihili* that looms in the wings of the history of Western music and opera, as what threatens their capacity for expression (as well as the artistic discourses—usually “literary” ones—that often quite naïvely and abusively fetishize this expressiveness as a mystified and ineffable panacea for the problems of language). Yet, rather than simply highlighting a problem—as if what were under discussion here were only a matter of

erasing a mistake and starting again, recognizing a fake and moving on, and not a more fundamental condition of expression in general—this project will further examine the manner in which these moments of failure also become aesthetically generative, how such a corruption of the means of expression would not simply reduce art to silence, but instead produce a silence within art, introducing a rupture within it that stops it from becoming, on the one hand, the pedagogical-ideological illustration of a moral system, or, on the other, as Hegel had hoped, articulating itself as philosophy.

2. Neither / Nor

The site of this problematic, despite the problems it introduces for a metaphysics of expression, can be located relatively easily (at least for the time being) in a schematization of the potential relations between music and language, such as the one that Steven Paul Scher outlined (226-230). For Scher, potential relationships between music and literature primarily occur within three paradigms:

1. “music in literature,” i.e., the potentially “musical” aspects of poetry and language (rhythm, accent, pitch, color, etc.), for which Scher gives the famous example of Paul Verlaine’s “Chanson d’automne;”
2. “literature in music,” i.e., the interpretation of literature through music (program music, etc.);
3. “music and literature,” i.e., music that incorporates texts (opera, *lieder*, etc.).¹¹

Each of these three categories helpfully arranges the possible combinations of music and literature as objects of intellectual inquiry. However, especially given what has been said above,

¹¹ Scher here focuses on “literature” and music, whereas I will focus more broadly on theories of “language” and music, in relation to which I will sometimes turn to literature and sometimes to philosophy. Scher’s schema seems to function well enough in either case.

this schema would seem logically to imply a fourth permutation, namely something like “neither literature nor music.” Were it to be pursued, this somewhat more ambiguous fourth category might name the moment when the expressive capacities of both music and language are broken down and each is opened to the other not through shared form and/or content, but precisely in the failure or corruption of such aesthetic categories. To invoke Blanchot once more, this relation of language and music would begin where each “devient une question” (*La Part du feu* 293). The following chapters will thus explore how different thinkers and artists have sought out this question of formal corruption, whether hopefully or in horror, and how they have subsequently incorporated it into their approach to art.

For instance, the first chapter of this dissertation begins by examining the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writing on music, language, and opera, reading it alongside some of the historical discourses in which it participated. In his *Essai sur l’origine des langues* especially, Rousseau argued that the secret of musical and operatic expressiveness can be found in the supposedly *melodic* origins of human language as the expression of passion. In Rousseau’s speculative anthropological account, however, such an originary expressiveness does not last, and is quickly supplemented and supplanted by linguistic structures that he groups together under the name of “articulation.” For Rousseau, the more closely that modern languages maintain themselves in relation to an originary melodicality, the more suitable they will be for an expressive operatic declamation. Conversely, the more “articulated” a language is, the more unmusical it becomes. In these latter kinds of language, what passes for musical expression is, for Rousseau, only a *vox nihili*,¹² a side-effect of the worthless supplementary structures that have corrupted a more original, passionate, melodic, and pure form of expressiveness.

¹² Rousseau does not, so far as I know, use this term, although in his *Lettre à M. d’Alembert*, when offering his own alternative to traditional theatrical spectacle, he writes: “Mais quels seront enfin les objets de ces Spectacles ?

However, as Jacques Derrida argues in his famous reading of the *Essai* in *De la grammatologie*, Rousseau's notion of articulation, which is at first depicted as a "dangerous supplement" befalling and corrupting language from the outside, is in fact already and necessarily present within language from the beginning, in its very origination *qua* language. Beginning from this observation, in Chapter 1 I demonstrate how the concept of supplementarity that Derrida develops in relation to Rousseau would also have to be at work within the latter's writing on music and opera. In examining a variety of Rousseau's texts on music, I show how a notion of articulation also comes to blur and trouble the boundary that distinguishes the musical from the non-musical—and how he is then unable to localize any pure source of musico-linguistic immediacy upon which to ground his conception of operatic expressiveness. With this in mind, as I show, Rousseau even suggests toward the end of his life that the closest one can get to operatic expression is a mutual *interruption* of the singer and the orchestra.

Chapter 2, by far the project's largest chapter, examines a similar narrative of musico-linguistic decadence, but in the nineteenth century, in a strange musico-literary confrontation between the German composer Richard Wagner and the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. For his part, Wagner developed a theory of drama and the arts, which he claimed had decayed from their singular origin and immediate unity in Greek tragic drama—into empty sensationalism, contingent form, and mere theatrical mimicry. As opposed to this state of affairs, Wagner wanted to unite the arts in his *Musikdrama*, again placing them in a necessary and immediately expressive unity. After generally outlining Wagner's theory of music-dramatic expression, I examine Mallarmé's literary engagements with the composer in the mid-1880s (in particular as

Qu'y montrera-t-on ? Rien, si l'on veut" (OC5 115). Lacoue-Labarthe cites also this line in Part II, Chapter 2 of Lacoue-Labarthe's *Poétique de l'histoire*. Rousseau's spectacle here would show "nothing" because it would circumvent representation in favor of immediate presence—and yet this "nothing" would illustrate precisely the extent to which this phantasy of presence is caught up with absence and thus requires a mediating and corrupting supplement.

they are mediated by an image of Wagner created in the writing of Charles Baudelaire and others). In short, although he was a great admirer of Wagner, Mallarmé actively challenged and ironized the former's desire to circumvent mimetic imitation. In analyzing this relationship of poet to composer, I again turn to Derrida, this time to his writing on Mallarmé from the late 1960s and early 1970s—especially “La double séance” and the currently unpublished seminar entitled *L'Écriture et le théâtre: Mallarmé/Artaud*. Through an interpretation of Derrida's reading of Mallarmé vis-à-vis Wagner (and Baudelaire) in the latter seminar, this chapter explores how Mallarmé's discussions of opera—and performance more generally—attempted to displace opera's claim to immediacy, and thus to produce another rupture (Derrida will say a “foyer absent”) at the heart of its musico-linguistic expressiveness.

Chapter 3 will then turn to the work of the twentieth-century Austrian and American composer Arnold Schoenberg—especially his opera *Moses und Aron*, which presents an explicit meditation on the (im)possibility of operatic immediacy in relation to the Talmudic prohibition on graven images. Schoenberg's opera will be read in relation to his own obsessions with the purity of musical expression, which persist in several places throughout his writing—especially in his early deployment of a notion of the unconscious, and a conception of the divine to which he turns later in his career. After outlining these aspects of Schoenberg's more general approach to musical expression, and positioning them in relation to his compositional practice, I show how *Moses und Aron* dramatizes the failure of opera's perpetual quest for immediacy—how, like Moses, Schoenberg is unable to articulate his divine or unconscious musical “idea” without recourse to the same formal structures that he thinks corrupt it. The chapter ends by following Jean-François Lyotard's psychoanalytic reading of Schoenberg's opera along these lines, especially in his 1972 essay, “Plusieurs silences.” There, Lyotard discusses serialism as one

manner in which Schoenberg attempts to “work through” music’s formal structures (in the psychoanalytic sense of *Durcharbeitung*)—systematically repeating, interrupting, and evacuating them of their formal stability, in order to gesture toward the presence of what it cannot articulate through them. But such gestures end only by circling around an evaporated phantasy of presence—a mirage in the desert produced by its search for purity.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores a more recent corruption of expression in two operatic works by the queer French-Canadian composer Claude Vivier—namely *Kopernikus: Opéra-rituel de mort* and *Lonely Child*—analyzing how this corruption manifests in Vivier’s persistent thematization of lost origins. This theme of lost origins in Vivier is especially marked by the fact of his own abandonment as a child, and by his rejection from the Catholic Church on the basis of his sexuality. Paradoxically, however, I demonstrate that, even if Vivier begins from such biographical experiences of loss, he then so rigorously inscribes them into his work that he ends by displacing the formal conditions—of music, language, and narrative—through which they might ever be adequately expressed as properties of his subjectivity. From this perspective, this last chapter considers how ideas of loss, absence, and death in Vivier’s work come to formally interrupt and corrupt its own possibility for expression.

Each of these chapters, respectively on a philosopher, a poet, and two composers, thus examines a different moment when the pure presence sought by musico-linguistic expression, at its most extreme, reveals itself to have been traversed by the artificial (Ch. 1), the mimetic (Ch. 2), tautology (Ch. 3), or absence (Ch. 4)—that is to say, when an operatic enchantment is corrupted by the voice of a deadened, ghostly repetition, or what Lacoue-Labarthe famously called “l’écho du sujet” (cf. *Pour n’en pas finir*).

3. Method (Envenomation)

Evidently, in addition to its psychoanalytic, musicological and literary-historical approaches, this dissertation is most heavily informed by a group of texts and thinkers often put under the heading of “deconstruction.”¹³ More than the first two thirds of the dissertation, for instance, examine how certain moments from the history of musical and particularly operatic aesthetics played a role in Derrida’s early writing (from 1967 to 1972): in this sense, music might be seen to be rather intimately tied up with deconstruction, participating in the same “metaphysics of presence” first addressed by Martin Heidegger and then by Derrida. Indeed, musical and sonic motifs—though often somewhat understated and not usually thematized as such—have never been entirely foreign to deconstruction and the writers associated with it: in addition to Derrida and Lyotard,¹⁴ one might recall here Blanchot’s essay on Orpheus; Georges Bataille’s generally undiscussed love of Mozart (to the point of structuring his novel *Le Bleu du ciel* after *Don Giovanni*); Paul de Man’s discussion of music, Derrida, and Rousseau in “The Rhetoric of Blindness;” Jean-Luc Nancy’s well-known text *Listening*; or the aural themes that resound throughout the writing of Hélène Cixous (cf. *Beethoven à jamais, ou l’existence de Dieu* or *Ayâ!*)

¹³ This approach is not a method. I have not applied it to the texts and artworks that are read here (as is often assumed, wrongly) in order to simply invert a set of hierarchical oppositions, to show how, actually, left is right and up is down. A deconstructive reading, as Derrida describes it in *De la grammatologie* (in a section titled “L’exorbitant. Question de method”), for instance, “[...] doit toujours viser un certain rapport, inaperçu de l’écrivain, entre ce qu’il commande et ce qu’il ne commande pas des schemas de la langue don’t il fait usage. Ce rapport n’est pas une certaine repartition quantitative d’ombre et de lumière, de faiblesse ou de force, mais une structure signifiante que la lecture critique doit produire” (219). In other words, a deconstructive reading would not attempt to correct the truth of a text, nor to locate it within some kind of pure textual relativism. It would instead, I would say, take a text *at its word*—attending to the moments when it exceeds the orbit of its author’s stated intentions, producing a reading of it that moves beyond the “declared” meaning or argument to which it attempts to limit itself.

¹⁴ One might not generally identify Lyotard’s philosophy as properly deconstructive, though he did use the term from time to time (albeit in a rather different manner than Derrida). It is in this sense that I would consider him to be related to a deconstruction, broadly construed. Ultimately, however, the supposedly selfsame identity of any category called “deconstruction” would always need to be challenged by the work of deconstruction itself, such that the question of whether Lyotard is “properly deconstructive” or not is less important than what he might contribute to its arguments.

Le cri de la littérature, etc.). A discussion of important scholarship at the intersection of deconstruction and music would also need to mention Rose Rosengard Subotnik's attempts to bring deconstruction together with musicology and analysis in *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society*, as well as Naomi-Waltham Smith's more recent examination of the musical formation of artistic communities in *Music and Belonging between Revolution and Restoration*. In addition to these, more general explorations of music and deconstruction include texts like Peter Szendy's "L'Oreille de Derrida: « écouter », ausculter, ponctuer" in *Derrida et la question de l'art: Déconstructions de l'esthétique*, Marcel Corbussen's interactive online text titled *Music in Deconstruction*, Christopher Morris's more recent "Music and Deconstruction" in the 2018 issue of *Derrida Today*, and Daniel Villegas Vélez's work on the concept of musical mimesis, as well as the texts that will be appearing in a forthcoming special issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review* dedicated to deconstruction and music. Finally, in this ad hoc literature review, it would be helpful to mention some of the other moments when figures of music and sound appear in Derrida's own writing (in varying degrees), which the reader might want to consult for themselves: "Tympan" (in *Marges de la philosophie*); *L'oreille de l'autre* (*otobiographies, transferts, traductions*); *L'oreille de Heidegger*; "Ce qui reste à force de musique;" *Ulysses gramophone : Deux mots pour Joyce*; the famous interview with Ornette Coleman; and even his more general discussions of the voice (which persist throughout his work, from *Voix et phénomène* through the interviews collected in *Échographies de la télévision*, etc.).

But I would most especially need to mention here another body of work, which I have in fact mentioned already—and which also generally informs this project, from just outside of its textual *mise en scène*—namely, the writing of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Here, for instance, is

part of a fragment in which Lacoue-Labarthe articulates a complex relation between three of the five major figures I will examine below, though over the space of just a few sentences:

La question central est comme par hasard la question central de la métaphysique: la representation. Moment où l'homme se sépare de lui (la mort) et se re-fait apparaître. Passage au *mythe*. Cf. Wagner corrigé par Mallarmé. / Est-ce que d'une certaine manière, ce n'est pas le sujet même de *Moïse et Aaron*?" (248).¹⁵

It is therefore not accidental that Wagner, Mallarmé, and Schoenberg, as well as Rousseau (cf. *Poétique de l'histoire*) would be brought together in this dissertation, before any number of other artists or philosophers (like Vivier), since Lacoue-Labarthe, for his part, has already analyzed their respective relationships to the deconstruction of a metaphysics of theatricality.¹⁶ However, the reason that this project will turn mainly to the early Derrida rather than Lacoue-Labarthe (with the intention, nevertheless, of further demonstrating the relevance of the latter's arguments, by exploring their importance to others before him) is that its primary concern is not the theatrical, nor even the mimetic (though these questions remain central to it), but a slightly different question, departing from the phantasy that music and language would not be always already circumscribed by the theater¹⁷—that the two might meet not only in their fundamental relationship to representation, in a *musica ficta* or what Lacoue-Labarthe would elsewhere call their ontotypology or originary mimesis, but also in the *horror vacui* that confronts the artist and the philosopher when they actually get what they want, when they reach the origin and find the imagined presence and plenitude of expressible *auto-affection* to have always been corrupted and

¹⁵ Here one might mention the first of Alain Badiou's *Cinq leçons sur le 'cas' Wagner*, which explicitly contrasts itself with Lacoue-Labarthe.

¹⁶ See *Poétique de l'histoire*, *Musica Ficta: Figures de Wagner*, and the essays collected in *Pour n'en finir pas: essais sur la musique*, especially "L'écho du sujet" and "Théâtre (ou: Opéra—ou: le simulacra—ou: le subterfuge)."

¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe: "Est-il possible de sortir du théâtre?" (254).

displaced by an absence (or “caesura”) that necessitates its re-presentation.¹⁸ In this sense, I am in agreement with Lacoue-Labarthe’s catachrestic idea of a *musica ficta*, but I am here more specifically interested in pursuing how Derrida’s thought (particularly the questions that he raises in his early work about “writing” and supplementarity) can be seen to have traced out the moment when the most intense desires for pure expression encounter it as a voice of nothing, an inaugural fracturing of experience opened in the strike of a typographical *Schlag*¹⁹—the moment, that is to say, when art has to constitute itself through a political gesture, producing reparative phantasies of a *sensus communis* in response to the irresistible desire for an immediacy that, like Eurydice’s shade, will have nevertheless disappeared from the start.²⁰ What this dissertation is concerned with, however, is not (only) the political structure of these phantasies—which Lacoue-Labarthe so often and so deftly examines—but more precisely the corruption and disappearance of experience to which they perpetually respond, and how this corruption can be and has been *re-aestheticized* within the history of music and literature. The approach here, then, is something more like a postmortem analysis of the hemotoxic venom of Ovid’s Orphic serpents (*Metamorphoses* Book X, l. 10; Book XI, ll. 56-57), of that which might prevent the inaugural wound of art from closing entirely within a politics governed by theatricality—even if the scab of a theatrical reframing will have always begun to form again, at the very spot where one most strongly claims to have escaped it.

¹⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe also uses the terminology of *horror*: see “L’horreur occidentale,” or the tragic or tragicomic horror in Part II of *Poétique de l’histoire*, which he examines through Rousseau, Schelling, and Bataille.

¹⁹ Cf. Derrida’s *Geschlecht III: sexe, race, nation, humanité*.

²⁰ One might also perhaps consider here Martin Heidegger’s “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes.”

4. A Note on “Aesthetics” and “Corruption”

In a discussion of Derrida and art, Geoffrey Bennington writes that “there can in principle *be* no deconstructive aesthetics (any more than there could be a deconstructive ethics or a deconstructive epistemology)” (“Aesthetics Interrupted” 22). This would be the case firstly because “[d]econstruction, in spite of what philosophers or historicists may be busy claiming, is not philosophy” (“Aesthetics Interrupted” 21), but also because of the challenge that deconstruction presents to the assumed possibility of a self-same perception (*aesthesis*) that lies at the basis of the philosophical project of aesthetics: a relation of deconstruction to aesthetics, then—to the extent that such a relation would take place at all—could only proceed from an “interruption of the presence of the present, and thereby of *aesthesis* itself” (“Aesthetics Interrupted” 29). As one instance of such an interruption, Bennington points to Derrida’s descriptions of a “*skiagraphia*”—of a writing or drawing of shadow that articulates visual art in relation to a blindness lying at the heart of visibility as such—found in the absorption and necessary disappearance of light in the line (*trait*).²¹ In *Penser à ne pas voir*, Derrida further suggests that such a displacement of the role of artistic perception would hold just as much for “the trait of writing, [and] the musical trait” (Derrida, qtd. in Bennington, “Aesthetics Interrupted” 30).

Aesthetic perception might then be seen to arise—by extension and along these lines—precisely through an interruption or corruption of the possibility of perception *in general*. Such a corruption would not be a mark or a stain on any purer relation to aesthetic experience, but rather the very condition of its recognition: it is in this same *skiagraphic* light, as I understand it, that Bennington describes deconstruction as “the generalized principle of an originary corruption that

²¹ See also Ginette Michaud’s “Ombres portées. Quelques remarques autour des skiographies de Jacques Derrida,” in *Derrida et la question de l’art: Déconstructions de l’esthétique*.

does not supervene on any prior purity” (“Aesthetics Interrupted” 21). And it would be in this sense that I understand this project to be simultaneously positioned in relation to a certain deconstruction at the same time as an “aesthetics of corruption”—not as the thematic exploration of artistic representations of corruption, but rather as a corruption of and within *aesthesis* as such.

But why “corruption?” Why not interruption (a term that, were it only a question of form, would probably be a better designation)? Why not disruption, irruption, deferral, gap, lag, caesura, or even—with a hysterical title like *Voices of Nothing*—silence? To be sure, these relatively similar motifs all recur in what follows (alongside others that correspond to them: supplementarity, artificiality, decadence, repetition, etc.). I have chosen the word “corruption,” however, specifically because of the several (at least three) ways in which it colors the aesthetic problem—or rather the problem of aesthetics—taken up in this dissertation. To begin with, “corruption” does completely and accurately name the formal structure of what has been outlined above, and it offers the possibility of doing so in relatively (though of course never entirely) neutral terms—as can be found in the word’s more contemporary *technological* uses, such as its use in relation to data corruption. Additionally, however, “corruption” can also less neutrally imply an intrusion of death,²² of contamination, decomposition and decay²³—or of, in this case, the undead echo at the basis of Orphic enchantment. And, finally, though it is not my primary concern here, the word “corruption” does also bring with it decidedly moral or political connotations, onto which this dissertation’s aesthetic problems inevitably open (again, cf. Lacoue-Labarthe).

²² For instance, Mary Douglas, in her famous anthropological study, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, writes of how “[r]eflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (5).

²³ Incidentally, the word “decay” presents another intersection of technology and corruption, as when one describes the decay of a signal or a sound.

In briefly considering this last point, one might recall the long and complicated history of music's relationship to ideas of moral or political corruption in the West—beginning at least with Plato's moral-political suspicions of music and mimetic poetry in Books III and IV of the *Republic*,²⁴ or Timeus's equation of music and harmony with justice in the prayer that opens the *Critias*. Similar tendencies then persist in several places throughout the history of philosophy, from Book 1 of Boethius's *De Institutione Musica*—according to which music might always either elevate or subvert one's morals (*mores vel honestare vel evertere*)—all the way to Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 1. There, in Chapter 15 of his text, for example, Rousseau wonders,

Si le plus grand empire qu'ont sur nous nos sensations n'est pas dû à des causes morales, pourquoi donc sommes-nous si sensibles à des impressions qui sont nulles pour des barbares? (OC5 419-420).

Because of its link to morality, then (with the caveat that Rousseau uses “morales” here in a very broad sense), for Rousseau all music would be necessarily possibly²⁵ corrupted and corrupting—and doubly so once it is again combined with language in the theater and becomes opera. Music would thus always risk contributing to the same spectacular dangers of a more general moral decadence, for example as Rousseau describes in his *Lettre à M. d'Alembert*. Although d'Alembert himself seemed to be generally skeptical of this kind of paranoia (cf. “De la liberté

²⁴ One might recall Plato's suspicions of the power of music, of its ability to either reinforce or corrupt the norms of a community: in Book IV of the *Republic* (424c), for instance, he famously cites the Greek musicologist Damon's warning that changes (τρόποι) in music are closely followed by changes in the state. Or, in Book III, he writes: “Therefore, when someone gives music an opportunity to charm his soul with the flute and to pour those sweet, soft, and plaintive tunes we mentioned through his ear, as through a funnel, when he spends his whole life humming them and delighting in them, then, at first, whatever spirit he has is softened, just as iron is tempered, and from being hard and useless, it is made useful. But if he keeps at it unrelentingly and is beguiled by the music, after a time his spirit is melted and dissolved until it vanishes and the very sinews of his soul are cut out and he becomes “a feeble warrior” (411a; *Complete Works* 1047). Plato's description here of a “feeble warrior” (a citation of the *Illiad*) might also echo his description of Orpheus in the *Symposium* as “soft-hearted” (cited above).

²⁵ Cf. Bennington's “Hap,” where he explores the structure of the “necessarily-possibly-not” in deconstruction.

de la musique,” for instance²⁶), he nevertheless also acknowledged the prevalence of this fear as it manifested in eighteenth-century pre-revolutionary France: here, for instance, d’Alembert ventriloquizes the politician who warns that changes in music might lead to political upheaval:

La liberté de la Musique suppose celle de sentir, la liberté de sentir entraîne celle de penser, la liberté de penser celle d'agir, & la liberté d'agir est la ruine des États.

Conservons donc l'Opéra tel qu'il est, si nous avons envie de conserver le Royaume; & mettons un frein à la licence de chanter, si si [sic] nous ne voulons pas que celle de parler la suive bientôt (*Mélanges de littérature d'histoire et de philosophie* 397).²⁷

Similar questions are later addressed by figures like Wagner, who envisioned his music drama as a revolutionary art opposing itself to modernity’s industrial “efflorescence of corruption” (*Blüte der Fäulnis*) and its generally “hohlen, seelenlosen, naturwidrigen Ordnung der menschlichen Dinge und Verhältnisse” (*Die Kunst und die Revolution* 286).²⁸ And yet the counterpart to such utopian hopes (for a revolutionary art that would lead us out of aesthetic, moral, and political corruption)²⁹ will be all too readily recognizable—in for example the Nazis’ label of *entartete Musik*, which prohibited all morally degenerate music (from jazz to Schoenberg), and which thereby juridically and politically reframed an earlier fin-de-siècle discourse of cultural

²⁶ Although he is nevertheless by and large defending Rousseau in his essay, D’Alembert writes: “La plupart des Lecteurs du Citoyen de Geneve opinioient à le traiter comme cet Artiste de la Grece, que de sévères Magistrats chasserent pour avoir voulu ajouter une corde à la lyre. Aurions-nous adopté ce principe de Platon, que tout changement dans la Musique annonce un changement dans les mœurs? Si c'est là le sujet de nos craintes, nous pouvons être tranquilles; nos mœurs sont à un point de perfection où le changement n'a rien à leur faire perdre” (384).

²⁷ Cf. Cynthia Verba’s *Music and the French Enlightenment*, 17.

²⁸ “Somit bezeichnet sie, als ungemein verbreitete dramatische Kunst, dem Anscheine nach die Blüte unserer Kultur, wie die griechische Tragödie den Höhepunkt des griechischen Geistes bezeichnete: aber diese ist die Blüte der Fäulnis einer hohlen, seelenlosen, naturwidrigen Ordnung der menschlichen Dinge und Verhältnisse” (Wagner, *Die Kunst und die Revolution* 286) [“Thus, as the broad-strewn art of drama, it denotes, to all appearance, the flower of our culture; just as the Grecian tragedy denoted the culminating point of the Grecian spirit; but ours is the efflorescence of corruption, of a hollow, soulless and unnatural condition of human affairs and human relations” (Translated by William Ashton Ellis, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, 43)].

²⁹ On Wagner’s utopianism and its legacies, see Kevin Karnes’s *A Kingdom not of this World: Wagner, the Arts, and Utopian Visions in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*.

decadence traceable at least to Max Nordau's *Entartung*. Ideas of music and corruption would be linked in different ways, then, from Plato to Hitler, from the theoretical purifications of the *Republic* through to the laws of the Third Reich—and invariably still today.³⁰

Although these are not the principle questions of this project on “corruption” in music and language, which perhaps remains too much of an exercise in aesthetic formalism and cultural history, they are never too far from it either. Indeed, the almost serpentine movement by which aesthetic problems become intertwined with moral ones (and vice versa) is one of the more interesting and productive difficulties that continued to arise for me over the course of this research. I hope that the reader will approach what follows with this difficulty in mind.

³⁰ Jankélévitch also briefly explores this problem in Chapter 1 of *La musique et l'ineffable*.

Chapter 1. Rousseau, Rameau and the Paradoxes of Articulation

*Comment peut-on parler d'une voix voilée, encore voilée jusque dans le chant, et même
dans le cri?*
Jacques Derrida³¹

[...] *il fait parler le silence même.*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau³²

The first time that Jean-Jacques Rousseau mentions music in the *Confessions* is in describing his aunt. He portrays her as having a sweet, reedy voice, with which she would sing all the many songs she knew. Rousseau was apparently so affected by these songs, and by her voice, that he credits her with inspiring in him the love for music that he would develop later in life, as a composer and music theorist of sorts. Even as an older man, long after his aunt had passed away, her songs would occasionally return to him. Though consciously forgotten, they would nevertheless return “avec un charme que je ne puis exprimer” (OCR1 11). And indeed, it is a problem of expression that would come to characterize Rousseau’s later relationship with music.

He describes one of these songs in particular, having recalled its melody but forgotten some of its words, the absences of which he marks with long ellipses.³³ Of this memory,

Rousseau writes:

³¹ Derrida, *Voiles* 61. See also: Ginette Michaud, “La voix voilée: Derrida lecteur du soi (Fragment d’une lecture de *Voiles*).”

³² *Essai sur l’origine des langues* (OCR5 837)

³³ “Tircis, je n’ose
Ecouter ton Chalumeau
Sous l’Ormeau;
Car on en cause
Déjà dans nôtre hameau.
.....
..... un berger
..... S’engager

Je cherche où est le charme attendrissant que mon coeur trouve à cette chanson : c'est un caprice auquel je ne comprends rien ; mais il m'est de tout impossibilité de la chanter jusqu'à la fin, sans être arrêté par mes larmes. J'ai cent fois projeté d'écrire à Paris pour faire chercher le reste des paroles, si tant est que quelqu'un les connoisse encore. Mais je suis presque sur que le plaisir que je prens à me rappeler cet air s'évanouiroit en partie, si j'avois la preuve que d'autres que ma pauvre tante Suson l'ont chanté (OCR1 11-12).

Rousseau is affected by the memory of the song to the point of tears. He searches for the source of this feeling, but, if one is to take him at his word, it cannot be found: it is a “caprice auquel je ne comprends rien.” The song’s charm, then, does not necessarily exist, for Rousseau, in anything specific to the song *itself*. In fact, were he to learn anything more about it, as an object, this knowledge would spoil his affective relationship with it. If he had proof that anyone but his poor aunt had sung it, it would be ruined: this is because—as will be discussed below—that which allows music to be reproducible and therefore expressible is for Rousseau precisely also what obscures, attenuates, and corrupts it. What moves him to tears would not be found in the song itself, then, but instead in the singularity of his aunt’s sweet, thin voice. Thus, to a certain degree, the most important part of this song as Rousseau recounts it would be not what he can remember, but what he has forgotten—and only inasmuch as it remains forgotten, as the vanishing point into which he can project a phantasy of presence. His ellipses can in this sense be read not so much as placeholders for missing information as the inscription of an always absent origin, of the song into the text, the unconscious trace of an irrecoverable voice.³⁴

..... sans danger;

Et toujours l'épine est sous la rose.” (OCR1 11).

³⁴ Indeed, it is rather likely that Rousseau would have been able to find the lyrics had he tried, which have been reprinted in the footnotes of the *Pleiade* (OCR1 1240).

Immediately after detailing this affectively charged memory, Rousseau characterizes it as a turning point in his own psychical development. He writes:

Telles furent les premières affections de mon entrée à la vie ; ainsi commençoit à se former ou à se montrer en moi ce coeur à la fois si fier et si tendre, ce caractère efféminé mais pourtant indomptable, qui, flottant toujours entre la foiblesse et la courage, entre la mollesse et la vertu, m’a jusqu’au bout mis en contradiction avec moi-même, et a fait que l’abstinence et la jouissance, le plaisir et la sagesse, m’ont également échappé (OCR1 12).

These “affections,” which Rousseau initially associates with the memory of a voice, place him in contradiction with himself, floating between their vicissitudes. Through them he portrays a fundamentally unstable relationship with himself (with what Derrida will elsewhere describe and problematize as “auto-affection”) that resists expression according to the dyadic alternatives that he presents (proud/tender, weakness/courage, pleasure/wisdom, etc.). Faced with a question of self-expression, then, Rousseau can only answer in the negative, once again by pointing to what *escapes* him, since in his view the formal conditions of expression corrupt the communication of its content. As Jean Starobinski puts it in *La transparence et l’obstacle*, Rousseau’s oeuvre espouses “une pensée tragique obsédée par l’idée de l’impossibilité de la communication humaine” (3).

The concern of this first chapter will be to outline how Rousseau develops this tragic obsession with contradiction and impossibility into a nuanced aesthetic problematic, specifically with regard to a relationship between music and language. Concentrating especially on the *Essai sur l’origine des langues*, the *Lettre sur la musique française*, and the *Dictionnaire de musique*, I will outline how Rousseau develops a theory of *articulation* that, as a structural complication in

the coeval development of language and music, can be seen to link the two by way of its roll in their mutual corruption. For Rousseau, this articulation comes to inevitably distort the singularity of what is articulated by it—namely interiority, affect—according to an externally imposed *arrangement* or *disposition* (see below). On the surface, Rousseau’s texts seem to portray this articulation as a fate specific only to language, which only then retroactively contaminates music in its relationship to the word, rendering it dependent on the cheap tricks of harmony as a supplement for its degraded expressiveness (cf. *Essai*, Chapter 14). However, as I will argue, the idea of articulation in Rousseau in fact functions as an initial bifurcation of the voice *in general*, which gives rise to the very possibilities of both language and music as such. This would mean that music is, in Rousseau’s view (at least by the end of his career), never any less mediated than language, and therefore never any less subject to a reductive system of identity. While certain figures of melodic music do maintain a privileged position in his work, they never quite function as the immediate expression of the passions that he wants them to be. They are always riddled with the “charme que je ne puis exprimer” (OCR1 11). Rather like the half-forgotten songs of his poor aunt, which haunt the beginning of his *Confessions*, the best possible fate for music and language in Rousseau is thus not so much any successful expression as the repetition of a silent and irrecoverable origin, in the inter-co-rruption of articulation itself, which in his view occurs (or has the best chance to occur) most substantially in certain *operatic* techniques.

Before arriving at these techniques, however, and in order to develop more fully the function of articulation in Rousseau’s thought, this chapter will first outline how his account of the origins of music and language are informed by and bear upon a much larger series of aesthetic debates—especially as they manifested in the 18th century, culminating in the *Querelle*

des Bouffons of the 1750s. The contours of these debates will be the subject of the following two sections.

1. Reason and Rhetoric

In a way somewhat similar to Rousseau's *Confessions*, the history of musical harmony in the West also begins with a poorly remembered story. According to a tale retold from Nicomachus the Pythagorean through Boethius's *De Institutione Musica* and beyond it, Pythagoras travelled near to a blacksmith's workshop where he "providentially" overheard the sounds of four hammers that, when struck together in different combinations, produced different consonances. In these hammers he heard the musical intervals of the octave, the fourth, and the fifth, and he immediately set to work to understand them. The story claims that he found these different sounds to be produced by the mathematical relationships between their varying weights (6, 8, 9, and 12 pounds). Upon arriving home, he supposedly reproduced these tones on weighted strings, extrapolating from his experiments a foundation for the tetrachord and ultimately the diatonic and chromatic scales. However, as Kenneth Guthrie observes as the editor of *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, the truth of this story is questionable, most obviously since "pieces of iron give the same note whether struck by heavy or light hammers" (Guthrie 58). He calls this an "ancient error" and suggests that Pythagoras "may have brought the discovery with him from Egypt" (ibid.).³⁵ One might wonder whether the factual incorrectness of the story has any bearing on its function.

Whether through a story told in error or through a well-told myth, it is to Pythagoras that Western harmony generally traces its roots. For Pythagoras, however, musical harmony was not only a mathematical exercise; it also served as proof for a cosmological system of number—an

³⁵ For more, see also Flora R. Levin's commentary in her translation of Nicomachus's *Manual of Harmony* (86-97).

idea which persisted in various forms from ancient Greece through the history of medieval Europe and beyond it as *musica mundana* or *musica universalis*.³⁶ The Pythagorean dictum, as it was recorded by Iamblichus, was “[a]ll things accord in number” (87): thus truth could only be “seen,” in a way, by rational intellection, and predominantly by way of mathematics:

‘Tis mind that all things sees and hears;

What else exists is deaf and blind (Iamblichus, 117).

Musical harmony begins then not as a sensuous art but as a function of idealized rationality.³⁷

³⁶ For more, see Jocelyn Godwin’s *The Harmony of the Spheres: A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition in Music*, and the first chapter of John Neubauer’s *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth Century Aesthetics*.

³⁷ The Pythagorean system of music begins by stacking the interval of the perfect fifth, in relation to an initial tone, using a series formulas based on the ratio 3:2 (the ratio of the perfect fifth), which results in a series that is today known as the “circle of fifths.” This process, yielding increasingly complex ratios with each calculation, more or less produces a distribution of the twelve semitones of Western music. However, there is a notable problem with a Pythagorean system tuning—namely, that the Pythagorean system’s grouping of fifths does not perfectly map onto the seven octaves over which they are supposed to be derived. The difference between the two groups of intervals leaves a remainder of 531441:524288 (about 23.46 cents), called the “Pythagorean comma,” which must be accounted for by reducing one of the intervals, and which results in a different dissonant “wolf tone” within each key that will sound significantly out of tune. Another way of stating the same problem is through the notion of enharmonicity, or the fact that certain pairs of musical notes should produce the same pitch. The problem, as J. Murray Barbour describes it in his *Tuning and Temperament: A Historical Survey*, is that “[w]hen Pythagorean tuning is extended to more than twelve notes in the octave, a sharpened note, as G♯, is higher than the synonymous flatted note, as A ♭ ” (1). In other words, when two enharmonically equivalent notes are mathematically calculated in relationship to the same original tone by perfect fifths (which would require two separate calculations), the resultant two notes, which should theoretically be the same, will be slightly out of tune with one another. The practical consequence of this problem is that, in order to retain Pythagorean ratios, key changes require a retuning of the instrument, so that wolf tones can be avoided. Theoretically speaking, this problem implies the insufficiency of a purely mathematical approach to music.

Around the 15th century, organists began to reduce, or “temper” the perfect fifths of Pythagorean tuning by various amounts, in a practice that came to be called “meantone temperament.” This practice produces the interval of the third at the pure, or “just” ratio of 5:4 (as opposed to the rougher ratio of the Pythagorean third, 81:64). Barbour points to Franchinus Gafarius’s 1496 *Musica Practica* as the first mention of meantone temperament, but speculates that it would have already been a fairly commonplace practice by that time (25). The different iterations of meantone temperament, however, while producing smoother sounding thirds, retained and in fact exacerbated the Pythagorean problem of enharmonic inequivalence. The solution to this problem arose with “equal temperament,” the first systematic approach to which was developed by Giovanni Maria Lafranco in 1533 (Barbour 44). Equal temperament, as its name suggests, tempers each interval equally by standardizing them to a ratio of $12\sqrt[2]{2}$. But because $12\sqrt[2]{2}$ is an irrational number, none of the twelve tones of equal temperament will be produced according to any *just* ratio, such as Pythagorean fifths (3:2) or meantone thirds (5:4). This has the advantage that the intervals between each note are standardized and that wolf tones therefore disappear, making modulations significantly less complicated; however, in order to achieve this comparative freedom, *every interval is also rendered slightly out of tune*. The Pythagorean mathematical legacy of music thereby results in an aporetic set of alternatives: one finds, on the one hand, a mathematical system that in fulfilling its goal fails to codify itself

By the Renaissance, however, the Pythagorean numerical approach to music would be challenged as the dominant paradigm—and not only as a system of tuning and harmony, but also in its metaphysical presuppositions. As opposed to a Pythagorean mathematical cosmology, which insists on the primacy of number in nature, a more pragmatically inclined³⁸ approach began to emerge, according to which music functions not as the physical manifestation of a cosmic harmony but instead more simply as an excitation of subjective feeling, of “the passions.” And it would do so, from this latter viewpoint, according to the importation of the ancient tenets of rhetoric (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, pronuntiatio*, etc.) into musical “*figurae*” (NGD, “Rhetoric and Music”). In part driven by the rediscovery of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* in 1416 and Cicero's *De Oratore* in 1422, along with Aristotle's *Rhetorica* (ibid.), the rhetorical approach to music was eventually adopted by a significant number of composers and music theorists. Among them, even the Renaissance theorist and composer Gioseffo Zarlino, according to Blake Wilson in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, “borrowed the Ciceronian vocabulary of *sonus* (euphony and smoothness of speech) and *numerus* (well-structured speech), and applied them to a Bemist concept of eloquence [...] in pursuit of an elevated style characterized by the beauty and *gravitas* found in Willaert's music and Petrarch's poetry” (ibid.).³⁹ This rhetorical approach peaked in popularity in the Baroque era, and, as Mark Evan

as a coherent system, and on the other, a coherent system that in universalizing itself is unable to fulfill its goal. One might therefore wonder how such mutually insufficient alternatives would bear on the moral-political metaphorizations of harmony that, from Plato to Kepler's *Harmonices mundi* and through to the present day, have come to influence so many ethical and political discourses. As John Neubauer notes, for instance: “the germinal idea of a Pythagorean and Platonic heavenly harmony informed Kepler's discovery of the law for planetary orbits, and the *Harmonices mundi* was offered to the king in the hope of furthering political harmony” (16).

³⁸ In *Wordless Rhetoric*, Mark Evan Bonds (53-61) borrows M.H. Abrams's categorizations of “pragmatic” and “expressive” to describe the transition from 18th to 19th century musical aesthetics. The artistic focus of the pragmatic 18th century was accomplishing its goal, that of provoking emotions and telling stories, whereas art in the 19th century was characterized more by the “expression” of a composer's or an author's interior psychology.

³⁹ Importantly, one should note that Zarlino's music theory also relies heavily on mathematics. This implies that the distinction between mathematical and rhetorical approaches to music should not be considered to be mutually exclusive.

Bonds notes in *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of Oration*, it would be utilized in varying degrees by figures such as Nicolaus Listenius, Gallus Dressler, Joachim Burmeister, Johannes Lippius, through to Athanasius Kircher and Marin Mersenne (61-62).⁴⁰

This rhetorical model of music sought to deploy formal rhetorical categories not for their own sake but in order to evoke one or more of the passions; in this way, rhetoric contributed to a larger aesthetic approach that became known as the “Doctrine of the Affections,” or the *Affektenlehre*. Notably, however, this Baroque doctrine significantly differs from later Romantic conception of musical affect that are characterized by “spontaneous emotional creativity” (*NGD*, “Rhetoric and Music”)—one that is still widely espoused today, especially in popular discourses on music and musicality.⁴¹ This latter conception of emotion is in no small part attributable to the influence of Rousseau, whose interventions into the aesthetics of Western art music will be explored in more detail below. As George Buelow characterizes it, the Baroque conception of affect would instead refer on the contrary to a “rationalized emotional state or passion:” these Baroque passions would be ordered within a system of meaning and thus presentable through a musical rhetoric as “emotional abstractions” (*ibid.*). Although the rationalization of the passions is not unique to the Baroque period (consider Plato’s tripartite division of the soul, or theories of the four humors, for instance), their formal *rhetoricization* in music provided a powerful alternative to the previously dominant mathematical model of universal harmony.

⁴⁰ Mersenne was also very concerned with mathematics, and is perhaps best known for his equations (Mersenne’s laws). But again, the intention here is not to juxtapose rhetoric with mathematics so much as to establish (after Bonds, Neubauer, Buelow, Bartel, et al.) that an alternative “rhetorical” outlook began to define itself in contradistinction to the Pythagorean view of music as proof of a cosmic harmony.

⁴¹ Theodor Adorno claims, for instance, claims that “[m]ost people listen emotionally: everything is heard in terms of the categories of late Romanticism and of the commodities derived from it, which are already tailored to emotional listening. Their listening is the more abstract the more emotional it is: music really only enables them to have a good cry. This is why they love the expression of longing more than happiness itself. [...] In a sense it is a kind of psychoanalysis for the masses, but one which makes them, if anything, even more dependent than before” (*Quasi Una Fantasia* 50). This passage, despite its somewhat condescending tone, trenchantly lays out a problem of musical culture that portrays it as an art based in the immediate presentation of feeling. See also Eduard Hanslick’s critique of this approach to music, as discussed in Chapter 2.

As others have argued,⁴² probably the most important text for this rhetorical approach to *Affekt* in the 17th century was Descartes's *Les passions de l'âme*, which, rather than condemning the passions along the lines of a Platonic-Christian tradition, portrays them as functions of the soul in its relation to the body, for which they would constitute a passive form of thought (Descartes 26-27) predicated on a theory of "les esprits animaux" (i.e., Descartes's early attempt to understand the nervous system). From Descartes's viewpoint, because the passions exist as partial functions of the nervous system, they cannot simply be willed either into or out of existence, though they can be engaged in a kind of indirect rational mediation. He writes: "Nos passions ne peuvent pas aussi directement être excitées ni ôtées par l'action de notre volonté ; mais elles peuvent l'être indirectement par la représentation des choses qui ont coutume d'être jointes avec les passions que nous voulons avoir, et qui sont contraires à celles que nous voulons rejeter" (Descartes 29). In the second section of Descartes's text (41), he goes on to outline six "*passions primitives*" (wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy, and sadness) from which he then derives a catalog of secondary passions; and although *Les passions de l'âme* does not engage with music directly (which Descartes does elsewhere, as in the *Compendium Musicae*), this tendency to categorize the passions is nonetheless fairly typical of the Baroque approach to musical rhetoric.⁴³ Influenced by this taxonomic and mechanical model, in other words, Baroque theories of musical representation attempted to engage the passions through the rhetorical organization of their external manifestations: as Catherine Kintzler describes it, for instance, "[l]es passions « tristes » et « enjouées » sont, à strictement parler, imitées musicalement par la médiation de leurs manifestations matérielles : hoquets, soupirs, silences, cascades de rire, hurlements, trépignements de la fureur, alanguissements du sommeil trouvent dans la musique une analogie

⁴² See Buelow ("Selective Bibliography," 252; also NGD, "Rhetoric and Music"), Neubauer (48-52), Thomas (25-29), and Kintzler (*Poétique* 371).

⁴³ According to Buelow (NGD, "Theory of the Affects"), this practice began with Mersenne and Kircher.

stricte et font qu'elle va opérer comme matériau sympathique sur le corps de l'auditeur" (*Poétique de l'opéra français* 371).

At the peak of the *Affektenlehre*'s popularity, German music theorist Johann Mattheson would create another such catalog of emotions, but in relation to specific musical keys, in his 1713 *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*.⁴⁴ And he again explored these relations (though in somewhat vaguer terms) in his 1739 *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*,⁴⁵ wherein he discusses music as a *Klangrede*, or "oration in sounds."⁴⁶ Indeed, at the close of Part II of *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Mattheson echoes this general Baroque attitude toward a rhetoric of passion in claiming that "[o]ur musical disposition is different from the rhetorical arrangement of a mere speech only in theme, subject or object" (470). Several pages later he takes this observation one step further, in posing a strange but telling rhetorical question: "Where is *Parrhesia* greater than in the composition of melody?" (483). Although traditionally the notion of *parrhesia* is understood in opposition to or more precisely in the absence of rhetoric (cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book IX, Chapter 2), Mattheson's question here implies that music might function to somehow fuse these two rather opposed terms, presumably inasmuch as the formal arrangements and performances of its rhetorical *Klangrede* would be able to cut to the core of emotion, evoking an *Affekt* and laying bare the heart in order to plainly speak the truth of a kind of speech before speech. Mattheson then continues, equally strangely: "One can almost touch *Paradoxa*, which presents something unexpected." (ibid.). The unexpected, or the unexpectable—this difference between *parrhesia* and *paradoxa* will also be the difference between Mattheson (as the representative of this larger musical tradition) and Rousseau, who will be discussed below.

⁴⁴ See Part III, Chapter 2 of Mattheson's text.

⁴⁵ See Part I, Chapter 3 of Mattheson's text. Here Mattheson writes that "everything which happens without praiseworthy affections, is nothing, does nothing, signifies nothing" (319).

⁴⁶ For a thorough discussion of Mattheson's notion of *Klangrede*, see Chapter 2 of Bonds's *Wordless Rhetoric*.

Both thinkers are ostensibly concerned with imitations of the passions through melody, but where Mattheson stops just short of paradoxes, Rousseau never tires of articulating them, even if sometimes he doesn't want to.⁴⁷

2. Corpse sonore

In the forward to *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Mattheson writes against the Pythagorean legacy of music, claiming that “[e]verything that goes on in music is based on mathematical relationships of intervals just about as much as seamanship is based on anchors and cables” (49).

In other words, mathematics is a useful musical tool, but it cannot be extended beyond its usefulness and made into either an explanatory or a teleological principle: mathematics “is no trifling matter; though of small importance when considering the whole” (*Capellmeister* 46).

Mattheson held this position throughout his career, making various polemical arguments against the Pythagorean viewpoint (cf. Neubauer, *Emancipation* 17-21). In order to combat a mathematical rationalism, Mattheson employed arguments taken from the British empiricist philosophies of Francis Bacon and John Locke, as well as the burgeoning acoustics of Joseph Sauveur (Neubauer, 18), especially in early texts like *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (1713), *Das beschützte Orchestre* (1717), and *Das forschende Orchestre* (1721). These texts enact (according, for instance, to Neubauer's reading) “an empiricist attack on the rationalist premise that musical harmonies reveal immutable cosmic laws” (ibid.). Mattheson thus attempted to

⁴⁷ Mattheson's discussion of both *parrhesia* and *paradoxa* here relates to the term's use in classical rhetoric (cf. Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*), though one might also see certain connections here with the Foucauldian idea of *parrhesia*, as well as Geoffrey Bennington's complication of it in *Scatter 1: The Politics of Politics in Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida*. There, Bennington problematizes the idea of speaking political “truth” (to power). Even if the “truth” of Mattheson's *parrhesia* here might be seen as somehow more purely aesthetic, one would also have to recognize—and I take this to be Bennington's point, even if he would figure it in slightly different terms—that the claim to a political truth is already the claim to an aesthetic truth, of the possibility or impossibility of the immediate *perception* of truth, which one then claims to be able to present both frankly and accurately. From this perspective, *Scatter 1* goes on to argue that claims to political immediacy are always already the result of rhetorical choices.

finish off a Pythagoreanism that had already been weakened by the Baroque *Affektenlehre*.

However,

neither these [early writings] nor his later crusades [in *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, for instance] could stamp out mathematical approaches to music, which gradually renewed themselves by jettisoning the accumulated burden of tradition. Ironically, just a year after Mattheson had buried Pythagoreanism, it was reborn in Rameau's epochal *Traité de l'harmonie*. Mattheson instantly recognized the new enemy, but he could no longer play a leading role in the battle that Rameau's theory unleashed in the 1750's (Neubauer 20-21).

If Mattheson can be seen to have thus culminated a series of historical debates, then the French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau might be understood to have reignited and recapitulated them according to a new set of premises, and in an explicitly 18th century French context.⁴⁸ And, from the beginning, it is in relationship to Rameau's theories that the younger Rousseau's positions would take shape.

Rameau's system of harmony was speculatively based on the physico-mathematical phenomenon of the superposition of waves in vibrating bodies.⁴⁹ In sound, this phenomenon produces overtones, or more specifically "partial" tones. As is generally understood today, almost all sounds are composed of a potentially infinite series of partial tones ("partials") that when taken together comprise each sound's "complex" timbre. In traditional musical tones, partials are more or less distributed according to what is called the "harmonic series", which mathematically describes the pattern in which a string or column of air vibrates not only across

⁴⁸ Relating Rameau to Pythagoras is a fairly common comparison: for instance, Claude Dauphin, in his *La Musique au temps des encyclopédistes* compares Rameau to Pythagoras while interestingly also comparing Rousseau to Aristoxenus (84-91), though such a comparison can only be taken so far. Consider for instance Rousseau's critique of Aristoxenian theory in his *Dictionnaire* article on "Voix."

⁴⁹ By the 19th century, this phenomenon would become known as a "standing wave."

its entire length, but also across smaller integral subdivisions (Figure 1) that *simultaneously* vibrate at progressively higher frequencies (Figure 2). For instance, the first harmonic overtones of C are C, G, C, E, G, B \flat , C, D, E, and so on. Each of these notes approximately describes a higher frequency of vibration existing “within” a fundamental tone C.⁵⁰

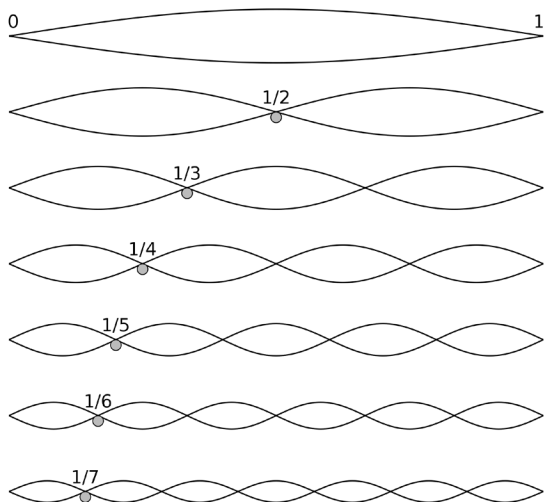


Figure 1.

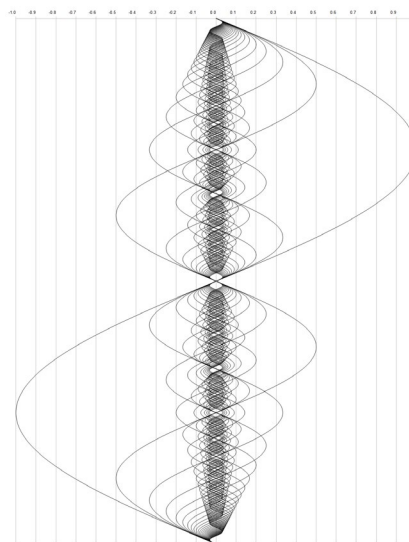


Figure 2.

The theories and proofs for the existence of these harmonic partials in the first half of 18th century constituted the basis for Rameau’s later harmonic theory of what he called the “*corps sonore*”.⁵¹

When exactly harmonic partials were first discovered still seems not to be known with any certainty. As Burdette Green notes (*Harmonic Series* 318-326), the first recorded observation of this phenomenon might be arguably attributable to either Aristotle, in the *Problemata* (Book XIX), or to Descartes in the *Compendium Musicae*—both of whom claim that

⁵⁰ For more, see entries on “the harmonic series” and “Acoustics” in NGD.

⁵¹ “*Corps sonore*” was not only Rameau’s term: it had already been used by Sauveur, for example.

a musical note “contains” its own octave. Yet, as Green argues, it is unclear whether these two accounts are in fact references to overtones, or whether they merely understand a note to “contain” its octave in the sense of its potential monochord divisions according to Pythagorean ratios.⁵² Nevertheless, according to Green, the first *explicit* reference to musical overtones was probably made by Marin Mersenne, in his 1623 *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim*, wherein he recalls having “noticed that three musical parts were rendered by the sound of a single bell” (Mersenne, as cited in Green 327). Mersenne subsequently explored the musical production of overtones in relationship to bells and strings, especially during the years surrounding the 1636 publication of his *Harmonie universelle* (Green 330). However, after Mersenne, there were then no rigorous or systematic studies of harmonic partials until the publication of Joseph Sauveur’s *Principes d’acoustique et de musique, ou Système général des intervalles des sons* in 1701,⁵³ which examined harmonic partials (“*Sons harmoniques*” as Sauveur called them⁵⁴) as objects of study in their own right, as opposed to considering them to be mere epiphenomena of musical tones. As Robert E. Maxham characterizes it, whereas Mersenne examined the harmonic series as part of an *extensive* study of music in general, “Sauveur’s method can be described as *intensive*—he attempted to discover the logical order inherent in the relatively small number of phenomena, as well as to establish systems of measurement, nomenclature, and symbols which would make accurate observation of acoustical phenomena describable in what would virtually be a universal language of sounds” (*The Contributions of Joseph Sauveur to Acoustics*, v. 1, 149; emphasis added). Sauveur thus attempted to develop the science of acoustics as a novel approach to sound that was independent of music (*Système général* 1), and in doing so can be said to have

⁵² In Chapter 10 of his *Manual of Harmony*, Nicomachus the Pythagorean describes the use of a monochord to prove the effects on pitch of the division of a string according to Pythagorean ratios.

⁵³ For an overview of observations on the harmonic series *between* Mersenne and Sauveur, see Green 396-403.

⁵⁴ See Sauveur’s *Système général*, Section IX: “*J’appelle Son harmonique d’un Son fondamental, celui qui fait plusieurs vibrations pendant que le Son fondamental n’en fait qu’une...*” (51).

lent the scientific weight of the Enlightenment to the study of harmony, if only retrospectively: such a scientific approach to harmony would have also made Sauveur's work extremely appealing for Rameau, who in 1722 had just published his *Traité de l'harmonie* by the time that he encountered it, likely in the comments of a review of his own *Traité* by Louis-Bertrand Castel (Christensen, 25-26).

Although uninfluenced by these contemporary developments in acoustics, the *Traité de l'harmonie* outlined another of Rameau's notable theoretical concepts—namely, his notion of the *basse fondamentale*, or the “root” of a harmonic configuration that would allow it to maintain its identity through any change in form (such as inversions).⁵⁵ Even before encountering Sauveur, then, Rameau was already concerned with rationally deduced foundational principles for music. Yet, as Thomas Christensen puts it, “the ink barely had time to dry in the *Traité*” before Rameau in 1726 published the *Nouveau Système de musique theorique* and reformulated his system to account for Sauveur's advances. Certainly by the time of his 1737 *Génération harmonique*, Rameau would have enthusiastically incorporated the discovery of harmonic partials into his thought, in the concept of the “*corps sonore*,” which can be seen to have updated the logic of his *basse fondamentale*, taking its place as Rameau's new generative and foundational principle of musical harmony:

La Proportion Harmonique [i.e., purely mathematical Pythagorean harmonic ratios] peut bien être regardée comme un principe en Musique, mais non pas comme le premier de tous ; elle n'y existe qu'à la faveur des differens Sons qu'on distingue dans la résonance d'une Corps sonore, & ceux-ci n'y existent qu'à la faveur du Son de la totalité de ce

⁵⁵ See Christiansen 25; and “Fundamental bass” in NGD.

même Corps : donc ce dernier Son en est le principe fondamental, & c'est de là qu'il falloit absolument partir (Rameau, Preface to *Génération harmonique*, [10]⁵⁶).

In 1750, Rameau would publish the final form of this physico-mathematical harmonic theory under the title of *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie*.⁵⁷ This new system attempted to derive the basis of musical harmony from the “totalité” of partials inherent in musical sounds and their *corps sonores*. Beginning with any musical tone, then, as if by an arche-writing of nature, Rameau theoretically derived the major triad (tonic-third-fifth)—the most important chord in Western tonal harmony—from the harmonic series. This derivation is possible since the first four overtones of the harmonic series are, precisely, after the fundamental tone, (1) the octave, (2) the twelfth, (3) the fifteenth or double octave, and (4) the seventeenth. Because a twelfth is an octave plus a fifth, and since a “seventeenth” names what would more commonly be described as a double octave plus a third, a simplified version of the first four overtones of the harmonic series would be (1) a repetition of the fundamental, (2) a fifth, (3) another repetition of the fundamental, and (4) a third. For example, in the above example of the key of C, the first four overtones are C, G, C, E, in which the major triad C-E-G can easily be seen. The derivation of the minor triad, however, caused Rameau significant problems, as its intervals were found nowhere together in the harmonic series of the *corps sonore*.⁵⁸ For this reason, Rameau

⁵⁶ In citing Rameau, I will give the original page numbers followed in brackets by the page numbers in Volume 3 of the *Complete Theoretical Writings*. In this case, the preface to the *Génération* does not have original page numbers, but for the sake of consistency I have left the page number from the *Complete Theoretical Writings* in brackets. When other volumes of the *Theoretical Writings* are cited, they will be marked as such.

⁵⁷ Rameau originally submitted his manuscript to the *Académie royale des sciences* in 1749 under the title of *Mémoire ou l'on expose les fondemens du système de musique théorique et pratique*. But, as Christensen outlines (39-40), he would subsequently edit the text and even change its title, thereby to some degree tricking the Academy, and especially Jean le Rond d'Alembert, into lending it credence when they might not have done so otherwise.

⁵⁸ The interval of the minor third does in fact exist in the harmonic series, but much more incidentally, first appearing in the 19th harmonic.

constructed various theoretical experiments throughout his texts,⁵⁹ which would either prove altogether incorrect, occasionally misleading (Christensen 29), or at the very least unconvincing. Rousseau later identified and critiqued this as one weak point of Rameau's system.⁶⁰

Rameau's theory, however flawed it may or may not have been, can be seen to have in any case extended the ambitions of a musical Pythagoreanism. Philosophically speaking, although Rameau's system places itself at a significant distance from the Pythagorean emphasis on number, it remains just as obsessed with epistemologically grounding music in a rationalized order found in nature. Rather than in pure number, however, Rameau locates his rational order in a Cartesian physico-mathematical model:

⁵⁹ For example, in the *Génération harmonique* (4-5 [16-17]) Rameau suggests that the harmonics of the *corps sonore* could produce a series of undertones, or subharmonics. This poses two problems, the first being that they do not actually occur naturally. Secondly, in order that these hypothetical subharmonics would be able to produce a triad at all, they would have to be the undertones of the *fifth* of the fundamental tone, which conflicts with his notion of the *basse fondamentale* and disrupts the identity of the chord (see Christensen, "Corps sonore" 28-29; also Neubauer 80). In attempting to prove his theory, he outlines an experiment (*Génération*, 8-9 [18-19]) according to which strings tuned a twelfth below the fundamental tone are supposed to sympathetically vibrate as a whole in accordance with these undertones. However, in reality they do not vibrate along their entirety, but only in nodes according to the frequency that the fundamental tone that it produces in them sympathetically (Christensen 29). Later, in the *Démonstration*, Rameau would admit as much (Rameau, *Démonstration* 64-67 [198-200]). As Christensen explains it, "[e]ssentially, Rameau admits strings tuned a twelfth and seventeenth below a sounding string do not resonate sympathetically as a whole, rather, only in aliquot parts corresponding to the frequency of the sounding string. This would produce a series of unisons. Rameau then lamely claims that this must still be the source of the minor triad, even though the triad is never acoustically sounded" (40). In Christensen's view (41), Rameau goes on to explain another theory of the derivation of the minor triad that interestingly foreshadows the theories of Helmholtz. But in any case, his inability to "naturally" derive the minor triad from the harmonic series like he derived the major triad presents a critical flaw in his system, the fundamental claim of which is precisely to be able to naturalize the modes of Western harmony in the physical phenomena of the *corps sonore*. Rousseau would be among the first to point out this flaw (O'Dea 17; see also footnote 30 below).

⁶⁰ Rousseau critiques Rameau's questionable experimental attempts to derive the minor third in the penultimate footnote of his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*: "Rapportant toute l'harmonie à ce principe très simple de la résonance des cordes dans leurs aliquotes, M. Rameau fonde le mode mineur et la dissonance sur sa prétendue expérience qu'une corde sonore en mouvement fait vibrer d'autres cordes plus longues à sa douzième et à sa dixseptième majeure ou grave. Ces cordes selon lui, vibrent et frémissent dans toute leur longueur, mais elles ne résonent pas. Voilà, ce me semble, un singulière physique ; c'est comme si l'on disoit que le soleil luit et qu'on ne voit rien" (OCR5 427). Additionally, according to Michael O'Dea, the article "Dissonance" in the *Encyclopédie* demonstrates that Rousseau "had already found the weak point of the minor third long before it became a commonplace among those who were unwilling to follow Rameau in his increasingly grandiose accounts of the place of harmony in the general scheme of Nature" (17). Rousseau also repeats this critique in his article "Harmonie" in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (OCR5 848-849).

La Musique est une Science Phisico-mathématique, le Son en est l'objet Phisique, & les rapports trouvés entre differens Sons en font l'objet Mathématique ; la fin est de plaire, & d'exciter en nous diverses passions (*Génération harmonique*, 30 [29]).

Here one can see the double influence of a certain Cartesian legacy. The end of music, rather than expressing a cosmic harmony, would be more modestly to excite the passions—and in this sense Rameau would have been influenced, however indirectly, by *Les passions de l'âme*. One might even say that this purpose of music, as Rameau sees it, is similar to if not the same as that of the theorists of the *Affektenlehre* (Mattheson et al.). Their disagreement would then come down more precisely to a question of how the passions are modelled: for Mattheson, the passions would be represented according to a symbolic *rhetoric* created through melody, whereas for Rameau—and in this sense he is more like Descartes (or Hegel, for that matter⁶¹)—they would be part of a larger system in which the musical subject derives pleasure from its recognition of reason in nature. Rameau, then, figures music as neither strictly mathematical (since mathematical relations would be always found within empirical phenomena) nor strictly empirical (since the *corps sonore* also had to be understood mathematically), but rather as a rational reality—which, as Kintzler observes, took its impetus from a Cartesian “model of intelligibility,” the musical foundations of which had already been laid down in the *Compendium Musicae* (Kintzler 405-406).

But Rameau's theory also departs from its Cartesian influence, inasmuch as “le principe premier est, selon Rameau, à chercher dans le monde ; or, c'est la psychologie rationnelle, on le sait, qui forme le point fondamental de la métaphysique cartésienne” (Kintzler 421). Thus, while both thinkers emphasize the necessity of an *a priori* reason for the comprehension of nature,

⁶¹ Consider when, in the Preface to the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Hegel famously paraphrases Plato in claiming that “Was vernünftig ist, das ist Wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig [What is rational is real; and what is real is rational]” *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 14).

Descartes locates this reason in the Cogito, whereas in Rameau's thought, "la nature et la raison sont le miroir l'une de l'autre" (Kintzler 414). For Rameau, in other words, reason manifests in the musical subject's ability to infer the presence a natural order existing within nature itself (namely, in the harmonic partials of the *corps sonore*). In fact, as its title suggests, Rameau's 1754 *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique*, in responding to Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique française*, would go so far as to characterize this relationship between the subject and the nature of harmony as an *instinct* (i-vii [259-261] and 1-3 [267-268])—which again suggests that the subject's musical reason is not its own, and is merely the biological manifestation of a natural rationality that always preexists it. Therefore, as Neubauer also claims (83), even if Rameau is often outwardly critical of Pythagoras,⁶² by externalizing a Cartesian reason into a larger order of nature, his system nonetheless begins to seem rather Pythagorean. Indeed, in the *Démonstration* and later writings, Rameau would even attempt to transform his theory of harmony into a true *musica universalis* in claiming that the principles of the *corps sonore* underlie all of science and mathematics in general: "C'est dans la Musique que la nature semble nous assigner le principe Phisique de ces premieres notions purement Mathématiques sur lesquelles roulent toutes les Sciences, je veux dire, les proportions, Harmonique, Arithmétique & Géométrie" (Rameau, vi [157]). In a sense, then, Rameau's system would simply invert and secularize the Pythagorean ontogenetic relation of mathematics to the physical reality of music.⁶³ Such claims, which Rameau made in rather grandiose terms, eventually contributed to the

⁶² See Rameau's late *Vérités également ignorées et intéressantes tirées du sein de la nature* (1764): "Pythagore oublie que c'est son oreille qui l'a guidé dans la différence des poids. [...] Ce grand Philosophe oublie le service important que lui rend son oreille, et il attribue aux nombres une vertu qu'ils ne pouvaient avoir par eux-mêmes" (*Vérités*, 8).

⁶³ Carl Dahlhaus characterizes Rameau's system as "cloaked in an aura of romantic Pythagoreanism—as a 'science' that feels itself drawn to the 'miraculous' instead of being adversely disposed to it" (*The Idea of Absolute Music*, 46).

degradation of his relationship with d'Alembert, who until then had been arguably his biggest advocate among the *philosophes* (Christensen, 42) .

Metaphysical ambitions notwithstanding, the radical priority that Rameau assigned to musical harmony would have a lasting impact. His operas, beginning with *Hippolyte et Aricie* in 1733, inaugurated a paradigm shift in French music away from Baroque-rhetorical conceptions of the relation between language and musical sound, as for instance represented by the work of Jean-Baptiste Lully, for whom composition is a question of associating “des significations aux sons de la musique, terme à terme, comme on croit pouvoir associer des significations aux sons d’une langue” (Kintzler, *Poétique* 395-396). For the Lullyists, Rameau’s music—which emphasized harmonic relationships themselves rather than the signification of affect as the primary source of musical aesthetic pleasure—was heard as “bizarre” and “tumultueux:” it “n’est que du bruit” (Mably, qtd. in Kintzler, *Poétique* 397). And yet, despite his music’s initially troubled reception, Rameau went on to become the dominant force in early eighteenth-century French opera, remaining relatively unchallenged in this position until the *Querelle des Bouffons* of the 1750s, during which time he ended up defending the same Lullyist tradition that he had earlier subverted.

Ultimately, though, if Rameau’s theories seem to privilege a natural and immediate musical pleasure of music over any rhetorical signification, this is still the privilege of a fairly narrow and strictly defined conception of what music is or can be, based fundamentally on certain assumptions that he had made about the harmonic series of the idea of the *corps sonore*. In the *Démonstration*, for instance, Rameau claims that what distinguishes a properly musical sound from mere noise is its harmonic complexity:

Le premier son qui frappa mon oreille fut un trait de lumière.^[64] Je m'aperçus tout d'un coup qu'il n'étoit pas un, ou que l'impression qu'il faisoit sur moi étoit composée ; voilà, me dis-je sur le champ, la différence du bruit & du son. Toute cause qui produit sur mon oreille une impression une & simple, me fait entendre du bruit ; toute cause qui produit sur mon oreille une impression composée de plusieurs autres, me fait entendre du son. J'appellai le son primitif, ou générateur, son fondamental, les concomitans sons harmoniques (Rameau, Writings v. 3, 12-13 [172-173]).

Neubauer interprets this passage to mean that for Rameau only musical sounds could have overtones, “sheer noise having none” (79-80). In other words, noise only presents the ear with a simple and indistinguishable sound, whereas a musical sound is a complex *corps sonore* in which one can distinguish the harmonic partials that form the basis for music.⁶⁵ Christensen points to an even stranger example of the same logic that can be found in the *Génération harmonique*, in which Rameau proposes the following experiment:

Suspendez une Pincette à un Cordon un peu mince, dont vous appliquerez chaque bout à chaque Oreille ; frappez-la, vous n'y distinguerez d'abord qu'une confusion de Sons, qui vous empêchera d'en pouvoir apprécier aucun : mais les plus aigus venant à s'éteindre insensiblement, à mesure que la résonnance diminue de force ; le plus grave, celui du Corps total, commence à s'emparer de l'Oreille, résonnant comme un des Sons graves du *Bourdon* de l'Orgue, qu'elle apprécie pour lors facilement, & avec lequel elle distingue encore sa Douzième & sa Dix-septième majeure, c'est-à-dire, son $\frac{1}{3}$ & son $\frac{1}{5}$ quelquefois l'un des deux seulement, selon l'attention qu'on y apporte, en réitérant l'Acte plusieurs fois (17-18 [23]).

⁶⁴ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁵ For a slightly different interpretation of this passage, see Kintzler, *Poétique* 413-414.

One can imagine Rameau standing resolutely underneath a pair of tongs, listening for the sounds of an organ like the ocean in a conch shell. According to this experiment-parable, what at first appears to be noise nevertheless later reveals itself to contain the harmonics of the *corps sonore*. In both cases, however, what these passages reveal is Rameau's inability to believe that a *corps sonore* might also be structured inharmonically.

In 1742, between this "experiment" and the publication of the *Démonstration*, the Swiss physicist Daniel Bernoulli "found that the initial vibrational modes of some flexible systems were not harmonic. That is to say, the frequencies of the upper modes did not necessarily relate in integral proportions to the frequency of the fundamental mode" (Christensen, 32).⁶⁶ This discovery, coupled with d'Alembert's development of partial differential calculus, allowed Bernoulli eventually to argue "that the *corps sonore*, as defined by Rameau, was a myth" (Christensen, 34), on the basis of what today are called "inharmonic partials"—or in other words, partials that do not correspond to the harmonic series. According to Bernoulli,

tous les corps sonores renferment en puissance une infinité de sons, & une infinité de manieres correspondantes de faire leurs vibrations régulières ; enfin, que dans chaque différente espece de vibrations les inflexions des parties du corps sonore se font d'une maniere différente (Bernoulli, *Réflexions et éclaircissemens sur les nouvelles vibrations des cordes exposées dans les mémoires de l'Académie de 1747 & 1748*, 151, as cited in Christensen, 47, note 42).

⁶⁶ As Christensen explains (31-32), one of Bernoulli's experiments shows how, of the first five "modes" of vibration in a vibrating rod, "[o]nly the frequency of the fourth mode stands in integral proportion to the fundamental. Similar inharmonic modes resulted no matter the clamping conditions of the rod." This suggests, in other words, that the "noise" of striking a metal rod would contain partial sounds just like a musical sound, but which would not progress according to the harmonic series. At this point, according to Christensen, "there was [still] no mention that such modes could coexist, although by now such a possibility had occurred to Bernoulli" (32).

This observation, which emphasizes the timbral singularity and potential inharmonicity of any sound, constituted a radical challenge to Rameau's idea that the overtones of the *corps sonore* would be necessarily harmonic (a foundational premise for his system inasmuch as it wants to ground Western harmony in an inherent rationality of nature). And in this way, the *corps sonore*, which appeared at first to give new life to theories of musical harmony, eventually came to open them up to their potentially infinite contamination with disproportion and noise.

Such a claim seems to scientifically parallel a similar critique that Rousseau implicitly levels against Rameau in Chapter 14 of the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, albeit from a decidedly different perspective.⁶⁷ Whereas Bernoulli attacked Rameau's system on the basis of discoveries in physics, Rousseau would engage with it philosophically, by way of a complicated aesthetic problem of expression mutually ingrained in both music and language. This problem of expression, which will be discussed in what follows, not only lead Rousseau to repudiate French music—for which Rameau was the highest representative—with regard to its overemphasis on harmony, but also subsequently to challenge the expressive capacities of music and language *in general*, placing an aporia at their origin, locating *paradoxa* at the foundation of a Matthesonian *parrhesia*. The radicality of Rousseau's approach thus lies not in his seemingly naive glorification of melody over harmony, so much as in his critique of music *as such*, at its very acoustic (lack of) foundation, by treating it according to what is initially a linguistic problem of mediation. Unpacking this claim, vis-à-vis the Rousseauian notion of articulation, will be the concern of the remainder of this chapter.

⁶⁷ "...elle [harmony] assujettit à deux seuls modes des chants qui devoient en avoir autant qu'il y a de tons oratoires; elle efface et détruit des multitudes des sons ou d'intervalles qui n'entrent pas dans son système" (OCR5 416). I will return to this comparison in more detail below.

3. From *Lettre* to *Essai*

On August 22, 1742, Jean-Jacques Rousseau presented his *Projet concernant des nouveaux signes pour la musique* to the *Académie royale des sciences*, who received it less than enthusiastically. The *Projet* outlines a new system of numerical musical signs as an alternative to the seven letters of Boethian notation. Already in the 1740s, then, Rousseau was in some sense concerned with a problem of writing and representation in music. A decade later, however, the conditions for such representation would cease to be numerical and would instead shift for Rousseau toward questions of language, with which he would remain concerned for the rest of his life. Then, in August of 1752, almost exactly ten years after his *Projet*, an Italian troupe performed Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* at the Paris Opéra: in doing so, they inadvertently spurred a controversy in which the entirety of the French operatic tradition of *tragédie en musique* (or *tragédie lyrique*) would be called into question—and especially the work of Rameau. This public controversy became known as the *Querelle des Bouffons*, taking its name from the comic actors of the Italian *opera buffa* that caused the scandal. It would also serve as the catalyst for Rousseau's first really significant public engagement with musical aesthetics, the *Lettre sur la musique française*.

The French tradition of the *tragédie en musique* was largely inaugurated by the work of Lully (and Philippe Quinault), but reached its culmination in Rameau. Cynthia Verba provides a good outline of its basic characteristics in her text *Music and the French Enlightenment: Rameau and the Philosophes in Dialogue*:

At the heart of the Lullian model [of *tragédie en musique*] are dramatic dialogue scenes, set mainly as recitative [...]. The setting, above all, highlights the text and dramatic situation. At the more impassioned moments in the dialogue the vocal line swells into

brief lyrical passages called *petits airs*. The stylistic similarity between the melodic recitatives on the one hand, and the brief and simple arias on the other, maintains continuity in the dialogue, with the music flowing smoothly between recitative and *petit air*. / As a balance to the musically austere dramatic dialogue scenes, French opera also contains lighter scenes of musical entertainment, known as *divertissements*. Drawing upon musical and theatrical ingredients traditionally favoured by the French, the *divertissements* are filled with choruses, ballet music, and lavish scenery and spectacle. The plots normally emphasize the magical effects of *le merveilleux* that were an equally beloved part of the French tradition. In the operas of Rameau, the sensuous pleasure of such scenes was further heightened through the richness of his choral and orchestral writing—using an elaborate contrapuntal texture and a wide range of harmonies. [...] French opera, in sum, was an aristocratic form of entertainment, carrying the audience into an artificial world of enchantment, or an equally extraordinary human world filled with noble or legendary characters moved by grand passions (12-13).

French *tragédie en musique* was a shibboleth of the French *ancien régime*, and indeed the critiques leveled against it have been interpreted as aesthetic prefigurations of later political concerns that would come to a head later in the French Revolution at the end of the century.⁶⁸ Thematizing the otherworldliness of “le merveilleux” alongside the seeming otherworldliness of the French aristocracy, *tragédie en musique* attempted to balance intensity of emotion with a Baroque formalism that often foregrounded linguistic signification, reinforcing it with musical ornamentation and shifts in harmony in order to emphasize meanings presented in language by the libretto and visually in the *mise en scène*. As already discussed above, Rameau’s music

⁶⁸ For a good overview of the history of the interpretation of this political-aesthetic intersection, see Charles B. Paul’s “Music and Ideology: Rameau, Rousseau, and 1789” in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* (Vol. 32, No. 3).

subsequently placed significantly more emphasis on the formal role of the music—especially harmony—which in his view provided a natural, even instinctive basis for aesthetic pleasure.

As opposed to *tragédie en musique*, the Italian *opera buffa* embodied by Pergolesi was, like ancient Greek comedy, “a more modest and popular form of entertainment, portraying ordinary people in everyday situations” (Verba, *Music* 13). In *opera buffa*, according to Verba’s characterization of it,

[t]he music and action move at a lively pace, clearly articulated through the use of brisk speech-like recitatives in the Italian *recitativo semplice* style, alternating with a series of tuneful arias written in the pre-classical *galant* style. Far from maintaining a continuous flow between recitatives and arias, the Italian opera sets them clearly apart from one another. The main focus is on melody, with the aria accompaniment confined to extremely simple and even rudimentary part-writing [...]. The Italian *opera buffa*, in sum, is the antithesis of French *tragédie lyrique* in virtually every respect: plot, character, structure, musical resources, staging, and especially in its use of the simple and popular style of the pre-classical *galant* (13).

Opera buffa portrayed its quotidian, lower class subjects with a simplicity that made the otherworldly hyper-formalism of French aristocratic opera appear unnecessarily ornamented and stilted. Therefore, Italian opera would have been understood at the time not only to offer an alternative musical style, but also a challenge to the very structure of French musical practice and even the French way of life in general. In Chapter 8 of the *Confessions*, for instance, Rousseau describes the consequences of the initial performance of *La serva padrona* as an irreparable blow to the integrity of French music:

il étoit arrivé à Paris des Bouffons italiens qu'on fit jouer sur le theatre de l'Opera, sans prévoir l'effet qu'ils y alloient faire. Quoiqu'ils fussent détestables et que l'Orchestre, alors très ignorant, estropiât à plaisir les pièces qu'ils donnèrent, elles ne laisserent pas de faire à l'Opera françois un tort qu'il n'a jamais réparé. La comparaison de ces deux musiques, entendues le même jour sur le même theatre déboucha les oreilles françoises ; il n'y en eut point qui put endurer la traînerie de leur musique après l'accent vif et marqué de l'Italienne (OCR1 383).

Although certainly he had been previously influenced by Italian opera, in part from having lived in Venice, this performance of Pergolesi in August 1752 marked a decisive turning point in Rousseau's thought. There was no going back—neither to the rhetorical flourishes of Lully, nor to the harmonic ostentation of Rameau. French music would need to be remade or abandoned—and Rousseau chose the latter.

However, such a negative view toward French music was not always the case for Rousseau. Indeed, in his *Lettre sur l'opéra italien et français*,⁶⁹ he writes that “[l]a musique Italienne me plait souverainement mais elle ne me touche point, la françoise ne me plaît que parce qu'elle me touche” (OCR5 255). The dating of this letter, like much of Rousseau's writing, is uncertain. In the Pléiade edition, Olivier Pot argues that although some date the letter around 1750, there is little evidence for it. Instead, Pot situates the writing of the letter sometime after December 1744 (OCR5 LXXVI). This would probably make more sense, since in the letter Rousseau cites the operas of Rameau as evidence of French musical superiority (OCR5 257). This fact would be significantly harder to explain following the break between the two figures in 1745—when Rameau, upon hearing Rousseau's *Les muses galantes*, openly criticized it during its performance and accused Rousseau of plagiarism. Verba notes that this event marked “not

⁶⁹ This title is the name that has been given to Rousseau's letter, which was not initially titled.

only embarrassment to Rousseau, [but] the beginning of a personal animosity that grew increasingly bitter over the years and coloured all their subsequent encounters” (11). By the time of the *Querelle* in 1752, then, Rousseau had completely reversed his position on Rameau and French music.

The *Lettre sur la musique française* was published in 1753, one year after the initial controversy had died down. Its publication ignited a series of public arguments with Rameau that lasted for years, and over multiple texts. The core of the *Lettre*'s⁷⁰ argument is that the difference between national musics is predicated on the difference between the languages in which they are composed, and that this manifests primarily through melody, which Rousseau takes to be the principal characteristic of music. Such a position runs exactly contrary to Rameau's, which, as discussed above, champions harmony as its foremost aesthetic principle, even if Rousseau agrees—erroneously—with Rameau that harmony is natural, and as a result that it “est la même pour toutes les Nations” (OCR5 292); it is for this reason he turns to melody in order to analyze the contrasts that sparked the *Querelle*, since melody would be what musically differentiates one nation from another. Yet, while Rousseau's work is often discussed in terms of the privilege that it affords to melody, it is also important to note that its advocacy for melody was not at all specific to him. As Neubauer describes, in actuality “the harmonists were outnumbered by the melodists, whose credo was already stated in Mattheson's *Das forschende Orchestre*” (*Emancipation* 67). Furthermore,

[t]he common view, well expressed by d'Alembert, was that harmony became the fashionable preference over melody when composers succumbed to sensation seeking. [...] The complaints of d'Alembert and Rousseau might be taken as signs that the harmonists were predominating. Yet, apart from a small group around Rameau, the

⁷⁰ All subsequent mentions of Rousseau's “*Lettre*” here will specifically refer to the *Lettre sur la musique française*.

theoretical preference for melody was virtually universal in mid-century France. In Germany the situation was not significantly different (ibid.).

Thus, while Rousseau's work is undoubtedly influential within a larger historical discourse, it is worth remembering that, at the time, his arguments for melody were not always unique.

Nevertheless, the theoretical relationship between language, music, and the passions that Rousseau specifies in the *Lettre* (and that he subsequently develops in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*) is somewhat more idiosyncratic.

In the *Lettre*, Rousseau writes that “[o]n peut concevoir des langues plus propres à la Musique les unes que les autres” (OCR5 292). Such an appropriateness of languages to music would be found especially in phonetic and prosodic characteristics. Speculating on this relationship, Rousseau performs a thought experiment, asking his reader to imagine with him a language entirely unsuited to music. This “hypothetical” language “ne seroit composée que de sons mixtes, de syllabes muettes, sourdes ou nazales, peu de voyelles sonores, beaucoup de consonnes et d’articulations” (ibid.). Here is the beginning of what Rousseau will later more explicitly thematize as a notion of “articulation.” At this point, however, his concern has specifically to do with language, which would exist in an almost causal relationship to music; that is to say that supposed defects in a language will go on to cause problems in music that is composed in relationship to it (though later, in the *Essai*, these musico-linguistic problems will be considered to be concurrent with one another, instead of one preceding the other). A language with an excess of consonants and few pleasant-sounding vowels results in a diminished capacity to produce expressive and pleasant melodies. And this means that music must turn instead to the overuse of harmonic modulation, counterpoint, and musical ornamentation (OCR5 293) in order to supplement such a lack of expressiveness. In this kind of deficient and supplemented music,

“*expression n’y auroit aucun sens*” (OCR5 296): it would become “dur, baroque et presque inchantable” (OCR5 295), or simply a “fracas” (OCR5 304). It would be a “*Musique écrite par excellence, et qui, tout au plus, n’est bonne, en effet, qu’à écrire, et jamais à exécuter*” (OCR5 309). Unsurprisingly, such a hypothetical, absolutely unmusical language turns out to be French, and this claim then leads Rousseau to argue that “les François n’ont point de Musique et n’en peuvent avoir ; ou que si jamais ils en ont une, ce sera tant pis pour eux (OCR5 328).”⁷¹

As opposed to the stale character of French music, hamstrung by a reliance on decadent and non-melodic formal structures, Rousseau proposes the principle of a “*unité de mélodie,*” according to which “le tout ensemble ne port à la fois qu’une mélodie à l’oreille et qu’une idée à l’esprit” (OCR5 305). He notes that “tous les bons Compositeurs Italiens” subscribe to this principle (*ibid.*), though he claims to be the first to name it. Another example of this principle would have been found in Rousseau’s own opera, *Le Devin du village*, which premiered at the Paris Opéra in March 1753, eight months before the publication of the *Lettre*. The *Devin* was extremely successful, and even impressed Louis XV, who had planned to offer Rousseau a pension, if Rousseau hadn’t avoided meeting with him (OCR1 379-380). Probably, then, much of Rousseau’s *Lettre* implicitly refers as much to his own work as to that of the Italians.⁷² Yet, although Rousseau clearly held his own opera in high esteem, alongside those of the Italians, it is

⁷¹ Needless to say, the polemical content of the *Lettre sur la musique française* struck a nerve with Rameau, who then responded to Rousseau’s musical theories. The first response, Rameau’s *Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique, et sur son principe*, came less than half a year after the *Lettre*, in April 1754. A second response to Rousseau, the *Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie*, was published anonymously in 1755 (with a second part published the following year). As its name suggests, it dealt directly with Rousseau’s musical entries in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. Rousseau drafted multiple unpublished responses to the attacks by Rameau: first, in his *Principe de la Mélodie ou réponse aux erreurs sur la Musique*, which then became *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau dans sa brochure intitulée «Erreurs sur la musique dans l’Encyclopédie»*. He had initially planned to use this latter text as the preface to his 1768 *Dictionnaire de musique*, but it was not published until after his death.

⁷² The initial “*Avertissement*” to the *Lettre* in fact contains an allusion to the success of Rousseau’s opera.

notable that when he discusses an absolutely expressive music in the *Lettre*, he explicitly and deliberately stops himself from developing what he claims would be its best possible example:

D'après une autre supposition contraire à celle que je viens de faire [with regard to French music], je pourrais déduire aisément toutes les qualités d'une véritable Musique, faite pour émouvoir, pour imiter, pour plaire, et pour porter au coeur les plus douces impressions de l'harmonie et du chant ; mais comme ceci nous écarteroit trop de notre sujet et des idées qui nous sont connues, j'aime mieux me borner à quelques observations sur la Musique Italienne, qui puisse nous aider à mieux juger de la nôtre (OCR5 296-297).

Why not go on here? What is this “véritable Musique” that he might have so easily deduced in place of Italian opera? Perhaps it is the music of the ancient Greeks, who indeed provide his favorite example of expressive music in his later writings. But if that were the case, he wouldn't need to “deduce” it so much as to simply cite it.⁷³ Alternatively, however, one might read this elision as the presentation of an absence (so to speak): Rousseau indicates that to describe this veritable music would take his reader too far away from his current subject—but if the current subject is *music*, then this suggests that such a “deduction” would involve a radical enough reconceptualization of what music is or can be that the very terms of Rousseau's argument would cease to function. This interpretation of Rousseau's deliberate omission here would prove to be relatively unjustified, if it were not that such a “deduction” is precisely what he attempts in some of his later unpublished works, namely in *L'Origine de la mélodie* and in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*.

* * *

⁷³ Admittedly, little is known about ancient Greek music, and even less would have been known in Rousseau's time: perhaps it then makes sense that he would have to “deduce” it. However, the fact that he fails to mention the Greeks at all might also indicate that he has something in mind that is more difficult to explain.

The subtitle that is often omitted from presentations of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* is "où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale." Already in the title, then, the object of the text is not simply language—nor, of course, is it simply music. The *Essai* itself was only published in 1781, after Rousseau's death, and when exactly the text was written is not known with certainty. In her introduction to the *Essai* for Flammarion (9), Kintzler surmises that Rousseau would have worked on it between 1756 and 1761, suggesting—after Porset, and also echoing observations already made by Derrida and Masson (DG 266-268)—that the *Essai* would have been initially written in order to further explore linguistic questions that Rousseau raised in 1755 with his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, as a sort of addendum. This exploration would have then been redrafted to include questions of music in light of his exchanges with Rameau. One could thus infer that it likely would have also intersected with initial drafts of *L'Origine de la mélodie* and subsequently with the *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*. Moreover, as Kintzler argues, the *Essai* addresses the concerns of political organization that are thematized later in *Du Contract social* in 1762, which leads her further to specify that the bulk of the *Essai* might have been written sometime between 1758 and 1761. To this short genealogy, one might add Olivier Pot's suggestion (OCR5 1460) that the *Essai* problematizes notions of communication and imitation in similar ways as *Émile*'s 1762 discussions of infancy.⁷⁴ These potential intertextual relations make Rousseau's *Essai* a manifestly complex and occasionally fragmented text, moving—sometimes seamlessly, sometimes erratically—between questions of language, music, affect, imitation, anthropology, geopolitics, and freedom. Here I will concentrate on what might be considered one of its more pervasive or central arguments, found in its speculative anthropological "deduction" of a common origin of both language and music.

⁷⁴ "Notons que... il n'y a pas de langage imitatif chez l'enfant" (Pot, OCR5 1460). See also Appendix 1.

As Bonds observes, the view of a common origin of music and language is not specific to Rousseau, but based on a “widely held assumption that music and language shared a common origin in earlier societies” (*Wordless Rhetoric*, 67). Even Rameau at one point posited an origin story for his theory of the *corps sonore* that involved the voice. In his 1757 *Nouvelles Réflexions sur le principe sonore*, he asks his reader to imagine a primitive human who might only express themselves with “différentes inflexions de la voix, secondées de quelques gestes” (Rameau, 216 [*Theoretical Writings*, vol. 4, 240]).⁷⁵ At a certain point, a harmonic consonance would be produced by accident: “le hasard peut produire entre les sons une consonance, dont il suffit d’être une fois frappé, pour que le plaisir qu’on en éprouve à la répéter” (ibid.). Rameau imagines that this first event would have most likely occurred through the voice, though he also notes that it might well have occurred through non-vocal natural phenomena as well: “Mettons encore, si l’on veut, que l’effet de la consonance ait été occasionné par quelques bruits de l’air, comme par exemple lorsque le vent souffle dans différentes cavités sonore ; tout est egal : une consonance en amène une autre à l’oreille” (ibid.). For Rameau, the *corps sonore* is first and foremost a phenomenon of the physical world, for which the voice would only be a vehicle, and an accidental one at that: “tout est egal” as long as harmonies are heard. For Rousseau, on the other hand, the primitive voice is itself the origin of music and language, inasmuch as it would express the most natural and immediate state of one’s passions. Rameau and Rousseau thus each privilege two separate aesthetic approaches based on two different conceptions of nature:⁷⁶ while Rameau looks to the laws of the physical world (as discussed above), Rousseau considers affective expressiveness to be primary: “la passion fait parler tous les organes et pare la voix de tout leur éclat ; ainsi les vers, les chants, la parole ont une origine commune” (OCR5 410). As

⁷⁵ See also Kintzler, *Poétique de l’Opéra français* 410-411.

⁷⁶ See Kintzler’s “Choc de deux esthétiques” (xiv), as well as her “Introduction” to the *Essai* for GF Flammarion (29).

Michael O'Dea succinctly puts it, "Rousseau's aesthetic is almost invariably affective in its orientation" (30). However, the status of this originary affectivity, as Rousseau outlines it in the *Essai* is rather complicated, and is significantly different from the rhetorical approach to the passions that forms the basis of the Baroque *Affektenlehre*.

The onto-epistemological status of the *Essai*'s eponymous "origin of languages" lies somewhere between hypothetical and completely fictive. As Kintzler notes, in multiple places, "[c]hez Rousseau [...] on voit ici s'édifier l'idée d'une langue primitive qui n'a pas nécessairement d'existence empirique : son existence est philosophique, ou du moins il importe peu qu'on croie ou non à son existence empirique" (*Essai* 230, footnote 39)—"l'état originaire [in the *Essai*] de la langue passionnée n'a de durée que fictive" (Kintzler, *Poétique* 446): "En réalité, puisque cette langue originaire n'existe pas, on ne peut l'étudier que par *déduction*" (Kintzler, *Poétique* 450; emphasis added). The *Essai*'s origin of languages can be seen in this way to arise from the "deduction" that Rousseau mentions but doesn't perform in the *Lettre*. But, as I am arguing here, such a deduction, rather than leading to any previously extant original language—although Rousseau does claim Greek to be a prototypically musical language—leads instead to an impasse around which both musical and linguistic expression are structured. This deduction begins in the *Essai* with a question of "primitive" communication, which Rousseau divides in two: "Les moyens généraux par lesquels nous pouvons agir sur les sens d'autrui se bornent à deux, savoir le mouvement et la voix. [...] Ainsi restent seulement la vue et l'ouïe pour organes passifs du langage entre des hommes dispersés" (OCR5 375). As Starobinski observes, Rousseau develops this dichotomy throughout his text in a series of dyadic "couples antinomiques:" feeling versus thought, desire versus need, hearing versus sight, accent versus articulation, singing versus speaking (*Accuser et séduire* 275-280), and so on. From the

beginning, here, language is split between passionate, aural, and accented expression, on the one hand, and cold, utilitarian, visual, articulated (or written) communication on the other. Each side of the division has benefits and drawbacks: “Ainsi l’on parle aux yeux bien mieux qu’aux oreilles : il n’y a personne qui ne sente la vérité du jugement d’Horace a cet égard” (OCR5 377). Visual, gestural, and articulate language thus serve as the better vehicles for the effective communication of distinct meanings—but “lorsqu’il est question d’émouvoir le coeur et d’enflammer les passions, c’est toute autre chose” (ibid.):

Les passions ont leurs gestes, mais elles ont aussi leurs accens, et ces accens qui nous font tressaillir, ces accens auxquels on ne peut dérober son organe pénètrent par lui jusqu’au fond du coeur, y portent malgré nous les mouvemens qui les arrachent, et nous font sentir ce que nous entendons (OCR5 378).

What exactly Rousseau means by accent here is often unclear. He often describes it by means of negation: “Nous n’avons aucune idée d’une langue sonore et harmonieuse qui parle autant par les sons que par les voix. Si l’on croit suppléer à l’accent par les accens on se tromp : On n’invente les accens que quand l’accent est déjà perdu” (OCR5 290). Downing Thomas suggests (102) that Rousseau’s notion of accent might to some degree relate Du Marsais’s, which figures accent as pitch. But this seems insufficient as a description of how Rousseau uses the term and, as Thomas goes on to claim, “the *accent* to which Rousseau refers appears as a phantasmagoric entity” (ibid.). Accent is then a rather vague modifier, but one might reasonably assume that Rousseau here uses it to “describe the superposition of speech and song” (ibid.) dictated primarily by the presence of a passion in an originary and naturally expressive use of the voice. As to what he might mean by passion, in the above passage, Rousseau also seems to be making a tendentially Cartesian formulation along the lines of *Les passions de l’âme*, according to which they would

function in spite of our conscious interpretations of them (“malgré nous”). As its etymology suggests, in other words, we suffer the passions. However, unlike the Baroque interpretation of Descartes in the *Affektenlehre*, which considered the passions to be rationalizable, Rousseau instead takes the unreasonable and obscure *experience* of them as his model. In this, as Verba maintains,⁷⁷ he would have been significantly influenced by the work of l’abbé Dubos, specifically his 1719 *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*:

Still following the Cartesian assumption of a mechanical orderly universe, Dubos assumes the universality of the passions. Now, however, they are conveyed directly through sensible experience—on the part of both the artist and the audience. The idea of passion is no longer the model, but passion itself. Artistic sensibility allows the artist to choose a pathetic or moving subject, and the work of art intensifies the original passion. / The elimination of the intervention of reason in the artistic experience also eliminates the need for intellectualization of formalization of the passions by the artist” (Verba 36).

Thus influenced to some degree⁷⁸ by the work of Dubos, Rousseau situated the experience of passion as the primary impetus for and the true “origin” of language, rather than any linguistic exigency. And although he initially implies that these two alternatives originally coexist, the *Essai* ultimately propose a story according to which need and articulation come to meditate and thus enervate the original, accented natural immediacy of the passions.

In deducing the relationship of this originary affect to language, Rousseau describes the natural state of humanity, dispersed across the globe, altogether before their convergence in

⁷⁷ Also Kintzler, *Poétique de l’opéra français* (439).

⁷⁸ Claude Dauphin claims that Rousseau makes a more radical break, even with Dubos: “Selon la spéculation de Dubos, d’Esteve et de Batteaux, la musique française répond à une vocation rhétorique et cartésienne. Sa composition fait état d’une médiation réussie entre les passions de l’âme et les mouvements sonores, entre l’expérience phénoménologique et la représentation symbolique. / En face d’eux, Rousseau acclame la musique italienne pour l’immédiateté de ses impressions, comme si ces données formelles provoquaient directement l’émotion, sans procédé référentiel” (*Musique au temps des encyclopédistes* 31).

linguistic communities. This description appears in different forms throughout Rousseau's oeuvre, notably in the *Discours sur l'inégalité* and later in *Du Contract social*. Of this natural state, Starobinski writes,

Tout commence par la solitude et le silence, au sein de la nature protectrice. La dispersion initiale, imaginée par Rousseau, constitue l'exact contraire du rassemblement. Mais l'homme de la nature n'est pas voué à la solitude absolue : il rencontre occasionnellement ses semblables, pour de brèves luttes ou de courtes amours. A ces rencontres instantanées correspond un signe vocal également instantané et ponctuel : le cri, qui coupe le silence originel par intermittence (Starobinski, *Le remède dans le mal* 209).

Here Starobinski is referencing an important passage in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, in which Rousseau posits "le cri de nature" as the first language:

Le premier langage de l'homme, le langage le plus universel, le plus énergique, et le seul dont il eut besoin, avant qu'il fallut persuader des hommes assemblés, est le cri de la Nature (OCR3 148).

Rousseau here imagines how an effective and articulate language might have developed from this initial cry of nature: this initial language, however, would have been highly contextual, and to move from it to a more general, abstract, and universalizable language would require the clarification of its terms. But this introduces an aporia into Rousseau's narrative (OCR3 149-151), since "les idées générales ne peuvent s'introduire dans l'Esprit qu'à l'aide des mots, et l'entendement ne les saisit que par des propositions" (OCR3 149): in other words, in order to move from a highly particularized language into an abstract and universally applicable one, the abstractions of language would have had to *already exist* in some sense. For the meaning of

words to be established, a coherent language would already need to exist through which this meaning could be instituted: Rousseau thus writes that “la parole paroît avoir été fort nécessaire, pour établir l’usage de la parole” (OCR3 148-149), and then goes on to describe “ce difficile Problème, lequel a été le plus nécessaire, de la Société déjà liée, à l’institution des Langues, ou des Langues déjà inventées, à l’établissement de la Société” (OCR3 151).

Rousseau’s original cry of nature, then, would have to be separated from the institution of language by a rather radical break—or “caesura,” as Lacoue-Labarthe would say⁷⁹—because of which this cry would perpetually remain at a structurally *pre-historical* level. As Rousseau notes several pages later, at this level,

[l]’art péroissoit avec l’inventeur ; Il n’y avoit ni éducation ni progrès, les générations se multiplioient inutilement ; et chacune partant toujours du même point, les Siècles s’écouloient dans toute la grossièreté des premiers âges, l’espèce étoit déjà vielle, et l’homme restoit toujours enfant (OCR3 160).⁸⁰

It is presumably in order to resolve this problem that Rousseau divides language into its affective and utilitarian uses in his *Essai*, as two distinct paths that it takes in its development (or lack thereof). This division then allows him to avoid the problems that would be entailed by a single narrative according to which the latter use of language would have to evolve somehow directly out of the former. Rousseau describes such a division of language as a function of climate and geography—thus engaging with another set of popular speculations that, as Marie-Elisabeth Duchez notes (OCR5 1495), would have had precedents in Mersenne and Dubos, and that had gained traction especially after Montesquieu’s theory of the climates outlined in his 1748 *De*

⁷⁹ See Part I, Chapter 3 of *Poétique de l’histoire*, where Lacoue Labarthe describes this aporetic structure of the origins of language in Rousseau’s *Discours*.

⁸⁰ Indeed, As Starobinski notes in the Rousseau’s *Oeuvres complètes*, the cry of nature resembles the cry of the infant in *Émile* (OC3, 1324).

l'esprit des lois.⁸¹ According to Rousseau's hypothetical narrative, much like in the Second Discourse, humans are portrayed as initially scattered across the globe and isolated from one another: but in the *Essai*, the particular manner in which they initially come together, and for what reason, will determine the character of the language that they use.⁸²

For those in meridional, southern European climates, language is destined to be impassioned, smooth, and melodic: having few harsh consonants and languorous long vowels, Rousseau often characterizes these languages by their song-like accent, as discussed above. This kind of melodious language develops in inverse proportion to the presence of need, which is why for Rousseau it is characteristic of southern climates, in which food and shelter are (supposed to be) plentiful and easy to find:

Toutes les passions rapprochent les hommes que la nécessité de chercher à vivre force à se fuir. Ce n'est ni la faim ni la soif, mais l'amour la haine la pitié la colère qui leur ont arraché les premières voix. Les fruits ne se dérobent point à nos mains, on peut s'en nourrir sans parler, on poursuit en silence la proie dont on veut se repaître ; mais pour émouvoir un jeune coeur, pour repousser un agresseur injuste la nature dicte des accens, des cris, des plaintes: voila les plus anciens mots inventés, et voila pourquoi les premières langues furent chantantes et passionnées avant d'être simples et méthodiques (OCR5 380-381).⁸³

⁸¹ Duchez goes on to name Condillac, Buffon, Lanessan, De Cahusac, and Pierre Estève as also having proposed similar theories.

⁸² See DG 297-300, where Derrida complicates what Bennington calls Rousseau's "phantasmatic geography" ("Fractal Geography" 139), describing how it names tendencies existing within *every* language, and thus how there could never be an absolutely southern or absolutely northern language. Indeed, as Derrida later writes, and as we might begin to see below, according to Rousseau's logic, "le nord absolu est la mort" (DG 307).

⁸³ One might note in passing here the interesting lack of punctuation separating Rousseau's examples of the passions—"l'amour la haine la pitié la colère"—perhaps emphasizing a lack of distinction between them.

For Rousseau, there is little reason to speak in the south. But when its inhabitants do vociferate, Rousseau relates their accent to the cry: “la nature dicte des accens, des cris, des plaintes”. The one place where people do naturally come together, and where they are thus afforded a chance to break their silence, is at the water well: “dans les lieux arides où l’on ne pouvoit avoir de l’eau que par des puits, il falut bien se réunir pour les creuser ou du moins s’accorder pour leur usage. Telle dut être l’origine des sociétés et des langues dans les pays chauds” (OCR5 405). Around one such well, in the *Essai*, Rousseau tells a story of sexual awakening:

Là [at the well] se formèrent les premiers liens des familles ; là furent les premiers rendez-vous des deux sexes. Les jeunes filles venoient chercher de l’eau pour le ménage, les jeunes hommes venoient abruver leurs troupeaux. Là des yeux accoutumés aux mêmes objets dès l’enfance commencèrent d’en voir de plus doux. Le coeur s’émut à ces nouveaux objets, un attrait inconnu le rendit moins sauvage, il sentit le plaisir de n’être pas seul. L’eau devint insensiblement plus nécessaire, le bétail eut soif plus souvent ; on arrivoit en hâte et l’on partoît à regret. [...] Là se firent les premières fêtes, les pieds bondissoient de joye, le geste empressé suffisoit plus, la voix l’accompagnoit d’accens passionnés, le plaisir et le desir confondus ensemble se faisoient sentir à la fois (OCR5 405-406).

Here the affective origin of language would manifest according to a structure comparable with phantasy, understood in the psychoanalytic sense given by Susan Isaacs, for instance: “Phantasy is (in the first instance) the mental corollary, the psychic representative, of instinct” (81).

Without leaning too heavily here on a psychoanalytic reading, one might say that the cattle become a projected mental correlate of the young cowherd's desire (the “attrait inconnu”) to return over and over to the well. That the cattle become thirstier, in other words, is a pretext for

the repetition of the scene until, finally, it erupts into a *fête*, pleasure and desire mixing *à la fois* in a kind of *jouissance* that calls forth the voice from its silence, in the ambiguous southern accent of passion. The temporal language that Rousseau uses here (*devint, plus souvent*) to describe this change from watering hole to pool party indicates that this process happens over time—and, once it happens, it happens again and again (as one might glean from the usage of the plural in “les premières fêtes”).⁸⁴ The well thus becomes the site of a repeatable *kairos* of passionate language. As Starobinski put it,

ici la question embarrassante évoquée dans le *Discours* n’intervient pas : Rousseau ne se demande pas quel langage antérieur à la convention a permis de conclure la convention.

Il lui suffit, dans une image superbe, d’associer l’adduction d’eau et le jaillissement de la première langue commune (*Accuser et séduire* 285).

Language pours out from affect like a wellspring. The text presumes that this initial interpersonal passion somehow eventually develops into a system of communication, but at its origin this speech would be always confounded with a *jouissance*—bound to repeat itself again and again, on the way to death, saying nothing. If this scene is able to represent the pure, passionate origin of language for Rousseau, this origin would be one from which nothing further could proceed, and that would be categorically different from later forms of communication: “L’art périssoit avec l’inventeur” (OCR3 160).

As humans spread farther north, however, their linguistic conventions begin to change. Rather than the passionate language of the south, the northern European languages are characterized by sharp articulations and a utilitarian approach to communication for the sake of mutual need: “le premier mot ne fut pas chez eux, *aimez-moi*, mais, *aidez-moi*” (OCR5 408). Because the north is cold and snowy, and therefore food is often scarce and life is harder to

⁸⁴ Starobinski marks the recurrence of *Là* in the scene as the mark of a return (*Le remède dans le mal* 210-211).

maintain, northerners would not have the luxury of experiencing the more refined *passions de l'âme*. They would experience instead what Descartes (18) called mere bodily perceptions, such as hunger, thirst, and pain. Since, according to this view, northern peoples would live in relatively constant need and labor, and since as such they would not have time for passionate expression, the languages of the north would be typified instead by an abundance of rough consonants that facilitate distinct and repeatable units of sound and that thereby allow their speakers to communicate more effectively with one another. The process by which these repeatable units of sound are formed is what Rousseau calls “articulation,” which he opposes to the “accent” of southern languages. An articulated language would allow the northerners to communicate more effectively and thus to work together to build a social infrastructure through which they would be able to survive in their harsh climate. But in the end, the cold articulations of a northern language leave no room for passion: pleasure and desire are finally replaced by grammar and logic. And, what is worse, for Rousseau this trajectory is the fate of *every* modern language. “Tout ceci mène à la confirmation de ce principe, que par un progrès naturel toutes les langues lettrées doivent changer de caractère et perdre de la force en gagnant de la clarté” (OCR5 392). Articulation insinuates itself into all languages, sapping them of their affective force in order to produce coherent grammars and distinct, communicable meanings.

This pseudo-historical development (or deduction) leaves modern languages with only the residue of a passionate “accent” left within them. And from here, Rousseau is able to revisit some of the arguments that he had made in the *Lettre sur la musique française* with regard to different languages’ capacities to generate good music. But by now, he considers even Italian to be unmusical:

Toute langue où l'on peut mettre plusieurs airs de musique sur les mêmes paroles n'a point d'accent musical déterminé. Si l'accent étoit déterminé, l'air le seroit aussi. Dès que le chant est arbitraire, l'accent est compté pour rien. / Je n'en excepte pas même l'italienne. La langue italienne non plus que la françoise n'est point par elle-même une langue musicale. La différence est seulement que l'une se prête à la musique, et que l'autre ne s'y prête pas" (ibid.).

Only perhaps the lost voices of the ancient Greeks could have produced an historical example of a properly musical language in the West, in which the accent of its impassioned speech would *of itself* produce a melody.⁸⁵ But here Rousseau equivocates. One might rightly wonder about the status of music in such a language, since, as the title of Chapter 18 of the essay claims, for instance, “le système musical des grecs n’avoit aucun rapport au nôtre” (OCR5 423): what would be left for a modern music in the Homeric *Sprechstimme*?⁸⁶

4. The Problem of the Cry

Another text has of course been haunting the margins of this reading of Rousseau—namely, Derrida’s “Genèse et structure de l’*Essai sur l’origine des langues*” in Part II of *De la grammatologie*. Working backwards through this text by Derrida, this section will pivot slightly away from Rousseau in order to show how Derrida identifies a problem with his notion of articulation, and how this problem has rather critical ramifications for the supposed relationship between music, language, and affect that Rousseau describes in his work. Here I will focus specifically on what Derrida identifies, in passing, as “the problem of the cry” in Rousseau: “il

⁸⁵ Specifically, Rousseau cites Homer as the prototypical example of a musical, accented speech (see Chapter 6 of the *Essai*).

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3.

faut poser le problème du cri—de ce qu'on a toujours exclu, du côté de l'animalité ou de la folie, comme le mythe du cri inarticulé—et de la voix dans l'histoire de la vie” (DG 228).

For Rousseau, as we have begun to see, speech and song (and poetry, notably) would be co-original: “les vers, les chants, la parole ont une origine commune” (OCR5 410). Chapter 4 of the *Essai* (“*Des Caractères distinctifs de la première langue et des changemens qu'elle dut éprouver*”) describes, to the extent that Rousseau can, the characteristics of this origin. Here, once again (as in the Second Discourse), he begins with the cry:

Les simples sons sortent naturellement du gosier, la bouche est naturellement plus ou moins ouverte ; mais les modifications de la langue et du palais qui font *articuler* exigent de l'attention, de l'exercice, on ne les fait point sans vouloir les faire, tous les enfans ont besoin de les apprendre et plusieurs n'y parviennent pas aisément. Dans toutes les langues les exclamations les plus vives sont inarticulées ; les *cris*, les gémissemens sont de simples voix (OCR5 382; emphasis added).

Instantaneously, however, Rousseau introduces a notion of articulation that modifies this origin. In fact, even *before* the cry occurs in this passage, it is prepared for (as a prepared dissonance) by “les modifications de la langue et du palais qui font articuler.” Here, then, as Derrida will claim, the origin of language *qua* language will require the Northern logic of articulation of which Rousseau wants to purify it. The passionate southern language of the well that Rousseau so colorfully describes later, in Chapter 9 of the text, is thus corrupted before it begins: either it is, as I have speculated above, an inarticulate cry from which no language can progress, or it is already subject to the articulation that Rousseau later portrays only as an external imposition on the accent of passion. Citing this passage, Derrida argues that the *Essai*'s original language is

infected from the beginning with articulation, even as Rousseau vehemently tries to relegate it to the status of a secondary addition⁸⁷ or supplement:⁸⁸

La passion ne saurait donc être exprimée ou imitée sans articulation. Le « cri de nature » (second *Discours*), « les simples sons qui sortent naturellement du gosier » (*Essai*, IV) ne font pas une langue parce que l'articulation n'y a pas encore joué. « Les voix naturelles sont inarticulées » (*Essai*, IV). La convention n'a de prise que sur l'articulation qui arrache la langue au cri et s'accroît avec les consonnes, les temps et la quantité. *La langue naît donc du processus de sa dégénérescence* (DG 331).⁸⁹

Earlier in his text, when discussing Rousseau's critique of Rameau, Derrida puts it even more straightforwardly: for Rousseau, "l'imitation, principe de l'art, a toujours déjà interrompu la plénitude naturelle" (DG 297). And, to be sure, since for Rousseau music and language are co-originary, such observations should hold true for music as well—a fact which Derrida does discuss, though again somewhat incidentally. It is perhaps also worth noticing that the discussion of music comes before that of articulation in *De la grammatologie*, and this constitutes an inversion of the order in which they are addressed by Rousseau.

"Il n'y a pas de musique avant le langage" (DG 270). Here Derrida echoes a central claim of the *Essai* in order to explain why Rousseau must treat language before music. However,

⁸⁷ In *De la grammatologie*, Derrida discusses through Rousseau what he calls "le mythe de l'addition" (DG 230), which he also identifies with metaphysics: "La métaphysique consiste dès lors à exclure la non-présence en déterminant le supplément comme extériorité simple, comme pure addition ou pure absence. C'est à l'intérieur de la structure de la supplémentarité que s'opère le travail d'exclusion. Le paradoxe, c'est qu'on annule l'addition en la considérant comme une pure addition. Ce qui s'ajoute n'est rien puisqu'il s'ajoute à une présence pleine à laquelle il est extérieur. La parole vient s'ajouter à la présence intuitive (de l'étant, de l'essence, de l'eidos, de l'ousia, etc.); l'écriture vient s'ajouter à la parole vive et présente à soi; la masturbation vient s'ajouter à l'expérience sexuelle dite normale; la culture vient s'ajouter à la nature, le mal à l'innocence, l'histoire à l'origine, etc." (DG 229-230).

⁸⁸ The "logic of the supplement" for Derrida is figured in Rousseau most clearly by *writing*—which Derrida develops at length in *De la grammatologie*. But, importantly for my argument here, Derrida also notes that "L'articulation est le devenir-écriture du langage" (DG 313).

⁸⁹ Here it is striking that "dégénérescence" perhaps refers to Chapter 19 of Rousseau's *Essai*, which is a chapter on music, entitled "Comment la musique a dégénéré."

Derrida's choice to place music nearer to the beginning of his own text seems to formally suggest how in Rousseau's thought the inverse must also be true: *Il n'y a pas de langage avant la musique*. Or, even more precisely, this observation would only be true to the extent that there is *neither music nor language before music or language*. In other words, to take Rousseau at his word, the passionate origin of music and language should be construed as something like a *vanishing point*, at which the structures of both music and language *are lost* within the "simple sound" or the "cry of nature."

Indeed, Derrida also goes on to remind his reader that "on ne peut traiter séparément des deux origines [of music and language or song and speech]" (DG 274):

Voilà l'histoire. Car l'histoire qui suit l'origine et s'y ajoute n'est que l'histoire de la séparation entre le chant et la parole. Si nous considérons la différence qui écartelé l'origine, il faut bien dire que cette histoire, qui est décadence et dégénérescence de part en part, n'a pas eu de veille. La dégénérescence comme séparation, sevrage de la parole et du chant, a toujours déjà commencé (ibid.).

The story of the origin of speech and song or of language and music is then the story of their separation and degeneration.⁹⁰ They would *originate in separation*: their decadence would be already inscribed in or as the inauguration of their origin. As in Freud's or Bataille's discussions of cellular division, their origin would be radically negated in the very process by which they come into being:⁹¹ their origin, in other words, would be their death. But of course this would be to move from one death to another, since, constituted by the movement of their separation, by the

⁹⁰ Kintzler calls this a "double dégénérescence" of music and language (*Poétique* 438).

⁹¹ Here I am referring especially to discussions of mitosis and meiosis in the Introduction to Bataille's *l'Erotisme* and Freud's discussions of these processes in relation to the death drive in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, both of which seem strangely appropriate as metaphors for the origin of language.

distance taken from a mutual origin, both music and language for Rousseau are quickly rendered dispassionate and lifeless in the supplement of articulation—in the mute writing of their sound.

All music qua music then necessarily becomes, as Rousseau says in his *Lettre sur la musique française*, a “Musique écrite *par excellence*” (OCR5 309). And Rousseau’s critique of the Ramist conception of harmony takes this originary separation as its basis: as Derrida describes it, for Rousseau “[l]e chromatique, la gamme, est à l’origine de l’art ce que l’écriture est à la parole” (DG 293). The *gamme* is the *γράμμα*. Or, more precisely, the articulation of tone required by the notes of the chromatic scale is to written music what the lingual and glottal articulation of words is to written language: this is the *devenir-écriture de la musique*. “Dès lors le supplément dangereux, la gamme ou l’harmonie, vient de l’extérieur s’ajouter comme le mal et le manque à l’heureuse et innocente plénitude” (DG 296). Harmony for Rousseau therefore does not just name the vertical dimension of music; it comes to figure the reduction and regulation of an original voice into a system of intervals as the foundation for the whole musical system of the West: the chromatic scale, major and minor modes, tunings and temperaments, modulations, cadences, consonance and dissonance, and so on.⁹² Naturally, then, such a broad conception of harmony as a form of articulation also has consequences for Rousseau’s theory of melody.

Rousseau’s short entry on “Melodie” in the *Dictionnaire de musique*, which devotes only about a page and a half to what is arguably the central concept of his theory of musical expression, defines it in relation to two principles (“La *Mélodie* se rapporte à deux principes différens” (OCR5 884)). Remarkably, the first principle of melody that Rousseau gives here is exactly *harmony*: “La *Mélodie* se rapporte à deux principes différens, selon la manière dont la considère. Prise par les rapports des Sons et par les règles du Mode, elle a son principe dans

⁹² Perhaps the exception to this list is rhythm. As a synchronic approach to music, such a view does not account for time. For Rousseau, however, rhythm would be produced in and by melody, as he discusses in the entry on “Melodie” in the *Dictionnaire* (OCR5 884).

l'Harmonie ; puisque c'est une analyse harmonique qui donne les Degrés de la Gamme [...]" (ibid.). Rousseau thus fairly straightforwardly renders melody's expressive capacity directly dependent on what he elsewhere characterizes as an artificial and unnatural supplement.⁹³ The second principle of melody is "l'accent des Langues" (OCR5 885), which, as a corrective to the first principle, is supposed to restore the affective basis of music through a remainder of language's passionate origin, as he describes it in the *Essai*. But in the *Essai* itself, it is precisely this principle of accent that harmony destroys: "elle [harmony] efface et détruit des multitudes de sons ou d'intervalles qui n'entrent pas dans son système ; en un mot, elle sépare tellement le chant de la parole que ces deux langages [of song and speech] se combattent, se contrarient, s'ôtent mutuellement tout caractère de vérité et ne se peuvent réunir sans absurdité dans un sujet pathétique" (OCR5 416). Melody is thus simultaneously dependent on and destroyed by harmony, and it must turn to an aspect of the voice for a solution to this predicament in which it finds itself. In this sense, Rousseau predicates the potential success or failure of melodic expression on its ability to *imitate* the purer melodicality—the "langage inarticulé" (ibid.)—found in the expression of passion at the origins of human language. But this imitation then leads back to the cry, to the moment at the well. The problem here, then, to put it directly, is that of recovering and representing an origin that fundamentally cannot be articulated by the systems for which it is the origin.⁹⁴

Leading up to his more developed claims about language, Derrida foregrounds this central problematic of music as it is presented by Rousseau:

⁹³ Derrida also quotes the entry on melody at length (DG 291-292) in part to show how harmony is already present in nature.

⁹⁴ Music is not always worse off for having this problem of form, which of course also allows it to be reproduced, to be developed, and to evolve. For Rousseau, as Derrida argues, it is not a question of remaining in nature, but rather of returning to it after having left: "A plusieurs paliers, la nature est le sol, le degré inférieur: il faut le franchir, l'exciter mais aussi le rejoindre. Il faut y faire retour mais sans annuler la différence. Celle-ci doit être presque nulle : celle qui sépare l'imitation de ce qu'elle imite" (DG 272).

Dans le *Dictionnaire de musique*, Rousseau avoue son embarras à l'article *chant*. Si le chant est bien « une sorte de modification de la voix humaine », il est bien difficile de lui assigner une modalité absolument propre. Après avoir proposé le « *calcul des intervalles* », Rousseau avance le critère fort équivoque de la « *permanence* », puis celui de la mélodie comme « *imitation... des accents de la voix parlante et passionnante* ». La difficulté tient à ce qu'il faut trouver ici les concepts d'une description interne et systématique. [...] Rousseau hésite donc, dans le *Dictionnaire* autant que dans l'*Essai*, entre deux nécessités : marquer la différence entre le système des intervalles vocaux et celui des intervalles musicaux, mais réserver aussi dans la voix originelle toutes les ressources du chant. La notion d'*imitation* réconcilie ces deux exigences dans l'ambiguïté (DG 271).

Here Derrida points to a problem derived from the fact that Rousseau cannot find a way to categorically distinguish song from speech: they are both equally corrupted. The materiality of the voice as it expresses itself in the passionate “cry of nature” is just as incommensurate with its modifications in a system of music, which organizes all possible uses of its *instruments* according a discrete “calculus of intervals.” This is to say that music—or worse, “musicality”—will be just as inadequate for Rousseau as a model for his idea of a pure and originary expressiveness. In other words, “articulation” would be not only an apparatus or *dispositif* necessary for the reproduction of language: it would also repeat itself at the level of music,⁹⁵ preventing it also from serving as the prototypically expressive art that it is often supposed to be (as in Mattheson's *parrhesia*, for instance). To actually recover the originary, passionate accent that is lost in the *Essai* would necessarily entail the destruction of music as such, obscuring the

⁹⁵ Derrida writes that “Rousseau tient compte de ce que A. Martinet appelle la double articulation de la langue: en sons et en mots” (DG 312). One might productively juxtapose this discussion with Nicolas Meeús's article “Musical Articulation,” which attempts to apply Martinet's theory of double articulation to music.

boundary that distinguishes it from noise. And, as Derrida also notes, this problem is precisely what leads Rousseau to his discussion of musical imitation, of using music to recall something that would annihilate it if actually recovered.

5. Articulation

Often Rousseau's theory of musical imitation—a quite different theory from the word painting and rhetorical catalogs of the Baroque *Affektenlehre*—is understood to be a sort of naïve proto-Romanticism, in which simplistic melodies psychologically present experiences of emotion that are otherwise ineffable by language: “d’où naît l’empire du chant sur les cœurs sensibles” (Rousseau OCR5 416).⁹⁶ This view, of course, is not entirely unfounded: for instance, Starobinski (*Remède* 221-222) points to Rousseau's entry “*Prima intenzione*” in the *Dictionnaire de musique*. Here inspiration once again springs forth miraculously, like water from the rock struck by Moses's staff, or “comme Pallas sortit tout armée du cerveau de Jupiter” (OCR5 994): “Les morceaux *di Prima intenzione* sont de ces rares coups de génie, dont toutes les idées sont si étroitement liées qu’elles n’en font, pour ainsi dire qu’une seule, et n’ont pu se présenter à l’esprit l’une sans l’autre” (ibid.). Starobinski (*Remède* 229-230) compares this divine inspirational logic with the figure of the legislator that Rousseau presents in *Du Contrat social*, for which—and it is worth noting since he will return in a later chapter—Moses serves as a prototypical example (cf. Bennington's analysis of the figure of the legislator in *Dudding: Des noms de Rousseau*, which analyzes the political consequences of the paradoxes that characterize Rousseau's thought).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Of Rousseau's theory of musical imitation, Kintzler notes that “la version vulgaire (« il y a un langage du cœur ») va devenir la philosophie officielle des âmes sensibles et bientôt le seul discours autorisé sur la musique” (*Poétique de l'opéra français*, 438). Cf. also Dauphin (*La Musique au temps des encyclopédistes* 31), Thomas (*Music and the Origins of Language* 140), and Neubauer (*The Emancipation of Music from Language* 102).

⁹⁷ Rousseau takes Moses as one example among others (especially Lycurgus and Solon) of the Legislator in Part II, Chapter 7 of *Du Contrat social*. In the political fragment on “Des juifs,” however, Moses is taken to be the

Elsewhere in the *Dictionnaire*, the entry “Génie” paints the musical portrait of Romantic genius: “Le *Génie* du Musicien soumet l’Univers entier à son Art. Il peint tous les tableaux par des Sons ; il fait parler le silence même ; il rend des idées par des sentimens, les sentimens par des accens ; et les passions qu’il exprime, il les excite au fond des coeurs (OCR5 837). Here Rousseau shares an aesthetic approach with Dubos (Verba 36) as well as with, in Downing Thomas’s view, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn (140): music “ne représentera pas directement ces choses, mais il excitera dans l’ame les mêmes sentimens qu’on éprouve en les voyant” (*Essai*, OCR5 422).⁹⁸ As opposed both to Baroque representations, in which the passions would be “imitées musicalement par la médiation de leurs manifestations matérielles” (Kintzler, *Poétique* 371), and to Rameau’s conception of affect as a strictly instinctual reaction to harmony, Rousseau understands music, and particularly melody, “comme signes de nos affections, de nos sentimens ; c’est ainsi qu’ils excitent en nous les mouvemens qu’ils expriment et dont nous y reconnoissons l’image” (*Essai*, OCR5 417). A good example of this side of Rousseau can be found even in his earlier criticisms of Lully’s *Armide* in the *Lettre sur la musique française*, wherein he chastises Lully for word painting (Verba 26) Renaud’s “sommeil” instead of portraying Armide’s anger: “il [Lully] a oublié la fureur d’Armide” (OCR5 323). From this point of view, the more closely that musical imitation in Rousseau approaches its originary mellifluence, the more intensely would it *immediately* communicate with and arouse the passions of its listener.

paradigmatic figure of the legislator, since his laws have lasted (OCR3 499). For an interesting comparison of the Legislator and Rousseau’s theory of music, see John T. Scott’s “Rousseau and the Melodious Language of Freedom,” in *The Journal of Politics*, in which he discusses Rousseau’s legislator as attending to “the cultural affective basis of the state” (824), and further claims that “Rousseau’s legislator is a musical legislator” (825). Consider also, in *L’Origine de la melodie* (OCR5 334) and again in the *Dictionnaire de musique* (“Chanson,” OCR5 690), how Rousseau plays with the plurivocity of the word νόμος, which carries the meaning of both “law” and “song” (OCR5 1501).

⁹⁸ This line is reused almost verbatim in the entry “Opéra” in the *Dictionnaire*: “il ne représente pas directement la chose, mais il réveille dans notre ame le même sentiment qu’on éprouve en la voyant” (OCR5 959).

But these proto-Romantic tendencies in Rousseau are contravened by another aspect of his writing on music, which has been the subject of this chapter, and which describes music as an always-inadequate system for the expression of passion. One can find this other tendency also already at work from the beginning, again in Rousseau's critique of *Armide*. At the pivotal moment of the opera, when, holding a knife over her hated prisoner, Armide falls in love with him in a sudden emotional reversal, Lully modulates away from the key of D using a seventh chord (Verba 27). By adding a single interval, he shifts D from acting as the tonic to acting as the dominant of G: needless to say, for Rousseau such an insignificant harmonic shift completely fails to capture the radical change in Armide's psychical or libidinal state. "Eh Dieux! Il est bien question de tonique et de dominante dans un instant où toute liaison harmonique doit être interrompue, où tout doit peindre le désordre et l'agitation" (OCR5 325, emphasis added). This statement can certainly be read in the vein of Rousseau's broader critique of French music's overreliance on harmony, but there is also no reason not to take Rousseau at his word here: to claim that the shift in Armide's affective state is such that "toute liaison harmonique doit être interrompue" is not merely to suggest a more jarring or even dissonant modulation. Instead, Rousseau here very straightforwardly calls for the rupturing of any harmonic relationship whatsoever. Even in 1753, then, Rousseau had suspected the acoustic articulation of the sound spectrum into musical tones according to a set of harmonic relationships to be inadequate as a principle of expression.

It is true that Rousseau largely accepted the *corps sonore* as an acoustically sound principle for music, as can be seen at the beginning of Chapter 14 of the *Essai*, for instance, when he implicitly agrees with Rameau that "[l]a beauté des sons est de la nature ; leur effet est purement physique, il résulte du concours des diverses particules d'air mises en mouvement par

le corps sonore, et par toutes ses aliquotes, peut-être à l'infini" (OCR5 415). What he opposes there is not the acoustic basis of Rameau's musical thought, but rather the way in which this thought privileges a narrow conception of what does and does not count as properly musical, as can be seen again when Rousseau says of Rameau's derivation of the major triad from the *corps sonore*, in the *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*, that,

outre ces trois sons harmoniques [that form the major triad], chaque son principal en donne beaucoup d'autres qui ne sont point harmoniques, et n'entrent point dans l'Accord parfait. [...] Or il y a une infinité de ces aliquotes qui peuvent échapper à nos sens, mais dont la résonance est démontrée par induction et n'est pas impossible à confirmer par expérience. L'Art les a rejetées de l'Harmonie, et voilà où il a commencé à substituer ses règles à celles de la Nature (OCR5 351).⁹⁹

Later, in his entry on "Harmonie" in the *Dictionnaire*, Rousseau makes another very similar critique.¹⁰⁰ By making claims like these, then, Rousseau's thought attempts to undermine the acoustic privilege of musical harmony in Rameau by appealing to the same physical basis that he uses as the foundation for his work.

Whether or not he had read Bernoulli's work, Rousseau here also borders on making a similar observation. And, although not often acknowledged, such observations show up in several places throughout his oeuvre. In order to read them, it might first be helpful to recall here Bernoulli's criticism of Rameau:

⁹⁹ Olivier Pot suggests (OCR5 1513) that the idea presented by this final sentence is influenced by observations in J.A. Serre's 1753 *Essais sur les principes de l'harmonie*.

¹⁰⁰ "D'ailleurs, le corps sonore ne donne pas seulement, outre le Son principal, les Sons qui composent avec lui l'Accord parfait, mais une infinité d'autres Sons, formés par toutes les aliquotes du corps sonore, lesquels n'entrent point dans cet Accord parfait" (OCR5 848-849). Béatrice Didier discusses this entry, among others, in "La Réflexion sur la dissonance chez les écrivains du XVIIIe siècle: d'Alembert, Diderot, Rousseau."

tous les corps sonores renferment en puissance une infinité de sons, & une infinité de manieres correspondantes de faire leurs vibrations régulières ; enfin, que dans chaque différente espece de vibrations les inflexions des parties du corps sonore se font d'une maniere différente (Bernoulli, *Réflexions*, op. cit.).

Compare this statement to Rousseau's discussion of harmony in the *Essai*:

Mais en donnant aussi des entraves à la mélodie elle lui ôte l'énergie et l'expression, elle efface l'accent passionné pour y substituer l'intervalle harmonique, elle assujettit à deux seuls modes des chants qui devoient en avoir autant qu'il y a de tons oratoires, elle efface et détruit des multitudes de sons ou d'intervalles qui n'entrent pas dans son système" (op. cit.).

Like Bernoulli's "infinité de sons, & une infinité de manieres correspondantes de faire leurs vibrations régulières," Rousseau posits "des multitudes des sons ou d'intervalles qui n'entrent pas dans son système." While it is not entirely clear whether or not Rousseau is here directly referencing the existence of inharmonic partials per se, he is in any case suggesting that a *corps sonore* will always exceed the musical harmonies to which Rameau theoretically wants to restrict it. Even more explicitly, in the entry for "Bruit" in the *Dictionnaire*, Rousseau refuses any binary distinction between musical sound and noise, referencing the phenomenon of sympathetic resonance in strings. After at first seeming to agree with Rameau's position on the subject, he begins to reveal its limitations:

On peut supposer, pour expliquer la différence qui se trouve à cet égard, entre le Bruit et le [musical] Son, que ce dernier n'est appréciable que par le concours de ses Harmoniques, et que le *Bruit* ne l'est point parce qu'il en est dépourvu [this is Rameau's position, see Section 3 above]. Mais outre que cette manière d'appréciation n'est pas

facile à concevoir, si l'émotion de l'air, causée par le Son, fait vibrer, avec une corde, les aliquotes de cette corde, on ne voit pas pourquoi l'émotion de l'air, causée par le *Bruit*, ébranlant cette même corde, n'ébranleroit pas de même ses aliquotes. Je ne sache pas qu'on ait observé aucune propriété de l'air qui puisse faire soupçonner que l'agitation qui produit le Son, et celle qui produit le Bruit prolongé, ne soient pas de même nature, et que l'action et réaction de l'air et du corps sonore, ou de l'air et du corps bruyant, se fassent par des loix différentes dans l'un et dans l'autre effet (OCR5 671).

Here is a third and even more caustic critique of Rameau in *L'Origine de la mélodie*, which centers on a question of the voice:

C'est une observation très judicieuse de M. Rameau que le son diffère du bruit en ce que le premier est appréciable et que le second ne l'est pas. Ce qui n'empêche point que le bruit ne soit que du son modifié comme on peut s'en convaincre avec un peu de réflexion. Il me suffit de remarquer ici que le son de la voix chantante est le même son de la voix parlante, mais permanent et soutenu, au lieu que dans la parole il est en état de fluxion continuelle et ne se soutient jamais. En effet on ne voit rien dans la conformation de la glotte qui puisse donner l'idée de deux sortes de voix (OCR5 332).

The voice itself thus represents for Rousseau the site at which the distinction between the musical and the nonmusical is annulled. But it is therefore also the site into which both musical and linguistic forms of articulation are always *inscribed*. In this passage Rousseau turns to the structure of the glottis—the physical organ of articulation par excellence—for confirmation that song and speech are of the same substance.¹⁰¹ Such an observation, which otherwise seems obvious, contradicts what he claims elsewhere, especially in the *Essai*—namely that articulated

¹⁰¹ Here Rousseau critiques an Aristoxenian theory propounded by Charles Pinot Duclos in his article *Déclamation des Anciens* in tome IV of the *Encyclopédie*, according to which spoken and sung language would be categorically different from one another (OCR5 1147-8). See also Duchez's note (OCR5 1497).

language is an addition to and distortion of the accented, passionate voice of the south. Here, by contrast, glottal articulation becomes the arbiter of the very distinction between musical and nonmusical sound, as it is produced in the human voice. Consider, in this regard, the entry for “Voix” in the *Dictionnaire*, in which Rousseau splits up the voice into four varieties:

Les physiiciens distinguent dans l’homme différentes sortes de *Voix*, ou, si l’on veut, ils considèrent la même *Voix* sous différentes faces.

1. Comme un simple Son, tel que le cri des enfans.
2. Comme un Son articulé, tel qu’il est dans la parole.
3. Dans le Chant, qui ajoûte à la parole la Modulation et la variété des Tons.
4. Dans la déclamation, qui paroît dépendre d’une nouvelle modification dans le Son et dans la substance même de la *Voix* ; Modification différente de celle du Chant et de celle de la parole, puisqu’elle peut s’unir à l’une et à l’autre, ou en être retranchée (OCR5 1146-1147).

All four alternatives are, “si l’on veut, [...] le même *Voix* sous différentes faces” (ibid.). The distinction between the musical and the nonmusical can no longer be considered a difference in kind: rather, the difference between them is recast as one between several potential modalities of the voice, which might be rephrased as:

1. Inarticulate vocalizations (minimal use of the vocal tract).
2. Articulation with regard to reproducible and comprehensible units of meaning.
3. Articulation with regard to the efficacious reproduction of tone.
4. An attempted combination of (2) and (3), and perhaps sometimes (1).

Since Rousseau distinguishes these four options by the process through which they modify the acoustic structure of the voice, all four can be seen as functions of what he calls “articulation.”¹⁰² Each would constitute a separate instrumental usage of the vocal tract, in which a form is biographically imprinted or inscribed upon it. “Musicality” or melodicality here would not constitute another, separate facet of the voice: it would merely constrain the vocal processes of spoken language by reducing its sonic variances according to a set of pitch classes (“permanence”). Even the simple sound or the cry of nature would constitute a mode of vocal “articulation” (though a negative one) characterized by the production of sound without regard for (2) or (3). The cry, then, would no longer produce merely a *bruit*—since for Rousseau the dichotomy between music and noise is a false one: through its anamorphoses of the vocal tract, the cry would instead produce a unique and equally complex sound composed of a set of non-integral, inharmonic partials. A perfectly declamatory music (4) would need to imitatively incorporate it, as the prototype of passionate linguistic “accent,” in order to supplement the tonal articulations of music (3) and the articulated consonants of speech (2). It is a question, then, of literally articulating the inarticulable, of incorporating into a structure that which is negated by this structure—supplementation by way of negation. In this way, even the cry would become an aspect of song that, for Rousseau, impossibly and unappreciably signs the grain of its voice like a paraph on the dotted line of the structural contract. What was figured as immediate expression is thus reduced to a function of mediation: the question of musical imitation in Rousseau cannot be posed outside of this logic. Like Julie’s Elysium,¹⁰³ passion can only be cultivated in a self-

¹⁰² In addition to Derrida’s arguments in *De la grammatologie*, André Wyss also gestures toward such a reading when, in speaking of accent in Rousseau, he claims that “l’« articulation » la remplace par une division située dans la parole elle-même ; c’est donc l’articulation qui divise l’accent en s’y opposant ou en le doublant au sein de la parole vive” (*L’Accent de l’écriture* 30).

¹⁰³ Rousseau’s discussion of Julie’s “orchard,” her Elysium, in *Julie, ou la nouvelle Heloise* (Quatrième Partie, *Lettre XI*, OCR2 470-488), is a prototypical example of artistic success in Rousseau. Here she cultivates natural beauty by

abandonment to nature; but unlike the garden, for Rousseau musical expression always seems to reinscribe nature into its problem of form.

6. The Obligation of Passion

Two countervailing tendencies thus run throughout Rousseau's work on music (as in his other work): on the one hand, there is an aesthetic injunction to express or evoke the passions as authentically and purely and immediately as possible. This immediacy is figured by often vague and strategically deployed notions of accent and melody. But, on the other hand, Rousseau consistently shows how any seemingly direct expression is always infiltrated and perverted by its form. No longer a Matthesonian *parrhesia*, then, musico-linguistic expression in Rousseau is structured around the always-fading echo of an originary passion, the appearance (*dokein*) of which is inexpressible, set beside and against itself (*para*) by the very conditions for its expression.

There may be one place in Rousseau, though, where expression can still occur: paradoxically, however, it would only occur by way of its failure. Musically, this expression would take place in an operatic compositional technique that Rousseau claims to invent and that he names the *récitatif obligé*—although, as Jacqueline Waeber has shown (in her essay, “L'invention du récitatif obligé”), Rousseau did not invent it, and it is questionable whether one can even say he gave it a name, since the term is only a translation of *recitativo obbligato*, what then would have been an Italian inflection of *récitatif accompagné*, or what Paul-Marie Masson

letting nature grow by itself in an “English garden,” without appearing to impose any human form upon it (though she nevertheless regulates its growth): “Ce lieu est charmant, il est vrai, mais agreste et abandonné; je n’y vois point de travail humain. Vous avez fermé la porte; l’eau est venue je ne sais comment; la nature seule a fait tout le reste et vous-même n’eussiez jamais su faire aussi bien qu’elle. Il est vrai, dit-elle, que la nature a tout fait, mais sous ma direction, et il n’y a rien là que je n’aye ordonné” (OCR2 472).

calls (after the Abbé Arnaud) *récitatif accompagné pathétique* (Masson 176-188).¹⁰⁴ Rousseau's *definition* of the term,¹⁰⁵ however, has an important affective component that is more distinctly his own. In the *Dictionnaire*, he describes it as a form of recitative in which the singer (*Récitant*) and the orchestra alternatively pass the melody between one another through a series of ritornellos, thus *obliging* the one's attention toward the other and binding them together. Rousseau considered this technique to achieve the height of musical expression at the time: "Ces passages alternatifs de Récitatif et de Mélodie revêtue de tout l'éclat de l'Orchestre, sont, ce qu'il y a de plus touchant, de plus ravissant, de plus énergique dans toute la Musique moderne" (OCR5 1013). And immediately after making this claim, Rousseau gives a more telling aesthetic explanation as to why this particular form would be the most touching:

L'Acteur agité, transporté d'une passion qui ne lui permet pas de tout dire, s'interrompt, s'arrête, fait des réticences, durant lesquelles l'Orchestre parle pour lui; et ces silences, ainsi remplis, affectent infiniment plus l'Auditeur que si l'Acteur disoit lui-même tout ce que la Musique fait entendre (ibid.; emphasis added).

Faced with the inability of traditional melody alone, and of music itself, to express the passions that they are supposed to, here the *récitatif obligé* obliges music to generate what might be loosely understood as a rhetorical *aposiopesis*—a figure that names the act of falling silent from a passion that cannot be spoken or sung.¹⁰⁶ The singer and the orchestra interrupt and supplement one another's reticences before themselves also falling silent. But, of course, such silences are hardly quiet, since they are filled either by the voice or by the orchestra—but what each expresses by itself is hardly satisfactory. The force of Rousseau's *récitatif obligé* would be

¹⁰⁴ For a good exploration of these distinctions, see Charles Dill's "Eighteenth-Century Models of French Recitative," in the *Journal of the Royal Music Association*, vol. 120, no. 2, 1995.

¹⁰⁵ Waeber: "le « récitatif obligé » a été rédéfini par Rousseau" ("*L'invention du récitatif obligé*" 190).

¹⁰⁶ One might also consider here Nicholas Royle's work on the figure of *aposiopesis*, for instance in "Quick Fiction: Some Remarks on Writing Today" (in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*).

derived instead only from the mutual corruption and failure of expression which the voice and the orchestra inflict upon one another. The splendor of their *éclat* would occur only in their mutual fragmentation (*éclater*).

Significantly, Rousseau returns to this device nearly ten years later, in his *Fragments d'observations sur l'Alceste italien de M. le Chevalier Gluck*, appended to the 1777 *Lettre à M. Burney*, which he wrote less than a year before his death. Here again, Rousseau describes the *récitatif obligé* as aposiopesis in all but name: “quand la violence de la passion fait entre couper la parole par des propos commencés et interrompus, tant à cause de la [~~violence~~¹⁰⁷] force des sentimens qui ne trouvent point de termes suffisans pour s'exprimer, qu'à cause de leur impétuosité qui les fait succéder en tumulte les uns aux autres, avec une rapidité sans suite et sans ordre” (OCR5 447; emphasis added). Rousseau figures this violent, interruptive silence as more expressive than any mere combination of speech and song:

Le silence de l'acteur dit alors plus que ses paroles, et ces réticences bien placées, bien ménagées et remplies d'un côté par la voix de l'orchestre et de l'autre par le jeu muet d'un acteur qui sent et ce qu'il dit et ce qu'il ne peut dire, ces réticences, dis-je, font un effet supérieur à celui même de la déclamation, et l'on ne peut les ôter sans lui ôter la plus grand partie de sa force (OCR5 448).

Even the best transcriptions of Rousseau's passionate accent into musical declamation ultimately fail—and such failure is then obligated to suffer the passions in silence, rather than to express them as such. This moment, as described by Rousseau, voids a naïve Romantic sentiment of its supposed immediacy, since the function of music is here predicated precisely on the evacuation of the subject's capacity for expression, which is dis-articulated by a problem of its form. Such

¹⁰⁷ Here the word *violence* is crossed out in the manuscript of the *brouillon*.

would be—as will be discussed in the next chapter—Rousseau’s legacy not for a Romantic but for a *decadent* or even modernist aesthetics.

Writing of Rousseau's legacy for Romanticism, Claude Dauphin claims that “[l]e texte est devenu prétexte. En y infiltrant la musique, le compositeur désiré, depuis Rousseau, donner à entendre la passion à l’oeuvre dans son expression la plus immédiate et peut-être la plus universelle” (83). Indeed, the text becomes pretext: but ultimately, for Rousseau, as I have argued, the pretext is *all there is*—a pretext giving voice to *nothing*, except perhaps a Lacoue-Labarthian “echo du sujet” that paradoxically occurs most intensely at the moment when, rent from itself, expression falls silent, when the origin, never having been reached, is abandoned. In its place, *sotto voce*, resounds the untranslatable *jouissance* of a necessarily perverted phantasy of a cry of nature. Here then, at the end, one might recall Rousseau’s most musical moment, when, in the *Confessions*, the songs of his Aunt present themselves in ellipses, the phantasm of their origin only inscribable by

Chapter 2. Infidelities: Mallarmé's *Vagues Nerfs*

Hymen, called by the voice of Orpheus, departed, and, dressed in his saffron robes, made his way through the vast skies to the Ciconian coast: but in vain. He was present at Orpheus's marriage, true, but he did not speak the usual words, display a joyful expression, or bring good luck. The torch, too, that he held, sputtered continually, with tear-provoking fumes, and no amount of shaking contrived to light it properly.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X¹⁰⁸

1. “décadence inaugurale”

Rousseau's theory of expression can be characterized by two tendencies. On the one hand, what is often understood to be a proto-Romantic tendency guides him toward the phantasm of musico-linguistic immediacy. According to this phantasy—which he often developed in direct relation to the aesthetics of opera—language and music would slough off the crutch of “articulation” that supplements and corrupts them, and instead adopt a lost “accent” through which they would be unified once more in a pure and primordial expressivity. On the other hand, and precisely through this pursuit of an original purity, as Derrida observes in *De la grammatologie*, Rousseau implicitly recognizes (or *describes*) the paradoxical fact that neither language nor music arises *as such* apart from the supplement or prosthesis that is simultaneously the source of their eventual degeneration into artificiality and inexpressiveness. At one point, Derrida calls this movement Rousseau's “décadence inaugurale,” writing that:

[...] il faut bien dire que cette histoire, qui est décadence et dégénérescence de part en part, n'a pas eu de veille. La dégénérescence comme séparation, sevrage de la parole et du chant, a toujours déjà commencé. Tout le texte de Rousseau *décrit*, nous allons le voir,

¹⁰⁸ A.S. Kline's translation.

l'origine comme commencement de la fin, comme *décadence inaugurale*" (*De la grammatologie* 274, qtd. in Chapter 1).

Rousseau's thought might thus be seen to contain both the germ of European Romanticism and the husk of its decadent rot and degeneration.

In this sense—and although Derrida's characterization of Rousseau here is certainly not a simply historical argument—one can hear in the formulation of this Rousseauian *décadence inaugurale* the beginnings of the "Romantic agony"¹⁰⁹ that would go on to characterize the *fin de siècle* European *décadence* about a century later. Such a claim can be partially substantiated, from the limited perspective of a literary history, by briefly looking to A.E. Carter's influential text from 1958, *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature*, which defines the notoriously elusive object of its study explicitly in terms of Rousseau. He writes: "But here is the paradox: the decadents, even when they refused to live by Rousseau's gospel, never denied its truth. They were like unfrocked priests celebrating the Black Mass—perfectly aware that their cult was blasphemous" (4-5). Carter goes on to identify the origins of *fin-de-siècle* decadence in the legacy of Rousseau's Romanticism more specifically as it gets parodied and perverted in the Marquis de Sade's novels, such as *Justine* (Carter 5), and in similar sensibilities carried through Gautier and Baudelaire into the latter half of the nineteenth century, when they are developed into a somewhat more distinct aesthetic. Tracing out this history in broad strokes, Carter characterizes the decadent aesthetic in terms of the privilege it affords to a perverse artificiality:

Artificiality, in fact, is the chief characteristic of decadence as the nineteenth century understood the word. By a voluntary contradiction of the nature-cult, writers were able to see all the traditional Romantic themes in a new light and a new perspective. Their whole approach, of course, was entirely deliberate: from Gautier to Mirbeau, everybody who

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*.

took up a pen realized that he was going “against the grain.” There is something provocative and irreverent, a delicious sense of schism, about them all. They accept civilization as corrupt, but take a perverse pleasure in that very corruption, preferring the civilized to the primitive and the artificial to the natural. They add nothing new to Rousseau’s premise; they simply adopt a different attitude—eschewing inspiration in favour of cold calculation, whether in aesthetics, literary theory, or psychology (25).

The decadent obsession with artificiality would, in this sense, not be the same as a theory of social constructivism,¹¹⁰ since the latter replaces the role of nature with that of culture and thereby only reproduces the metaphysics of presence that characterized (and in some ways continues to characterize) what Derrida called “the age of Rousseau.” Rather than abandoning one origin for another, then, Carter argues that the decadent aesthetic instead upholds the potential for Rousseau’s mythico-natural immediacy only in order to take pleasure in the forms of artificiality that interrupt, corrupt, pervert, and fall away from it. Artifice, superficiality, morbidity, accident, ornament, over-refinement, mediation, aloofness, acedia, oils, fabrics, veils, masks, make-up, mime: these figures are celebrated not as the bases for any new forms of artistic truth—whether natural or socially constructed—but only and precisely inasmuch as they obscure one’s access to its possibility, according to what Michael Riffaterre called “paradoxes *décadents*.” Again, however, as the previous chapter has already demonstrated, such paradoxes *already exist in Rousseau*, who declares the necessity for an expressive and Romantic élan at the same time as he describes its decadent enervation. In this sense, as Carter claims, the decadents themselves “add nothing new” to Rousseau’s premises; they merely enact a shift in perspective, transforming an aesthetic problem into an aesthetic principle.

¹¹⁰ Indeed, the decadents were often portrayed as fundamentally antisocial, as symptoms of a society in ruin (cf. Nordau).

The subject of this chapter will be a specific moment in such a post-Rousseauian decadence, as it manifested in late-nineteenth century discourses on music, literature, and opera. On the one hand, over a century after Rousseau, a similar project of joining music and language in a primordial (though not properly natural) melodic unity would be undertaken in its most hyperbolic form by the German composer and dramatist Richard Wagner¹¹¹—as well as, to a lesser degree, Franz Liszt. Generally opposed to the projects of Wagner and Liszt were figures like Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and Eduard Hanslick—the other side of what is sometimes called the “War of the Romantics.” However, instead of juxtaposing Wagner with these usual critics (though they will be discussed briefly), this chapter will reread his project through the work of the decadent poet Stéphane Mallarmé, for reasons that will become clearer below. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s especially (though before then as well), Mallarmé articulated a complex relationship between writing and the performing arts, confronting Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* with his own idiosyncratic understanding of a literary or artistic absolute. In doing so, as will be shown, Mallarmé did not simply *reject* Wagner’s musico-poetic project, as did his other critics, but instead attempted to *displace* it, in typical decadent fashion, by enshrouding its expressiveness within the fabrics and fabrications of the artificial.

In addressing Mallarmé’s reading of Wagner, this chapter will further explore how the musical, poetic, and dramatic concerns that he developed are also taken up by Derrida in an as yet unpublished seminar that he delivered from 1968 to 1969, entitled *L’Écriture et le théâtre: Mallarmé/Artaud*. This early seminar prefigures much of what Derrida went on to argue in “La

¹¹¹ In *Musica Ficta: Figures de Wagner*, Lacoue-Labarthe also notes in passing that Wagner’s discussions of language resemble those of Rousseau: “La métaphysique du langage ici à l’œuvre est toujours la même : elle est au fond rousseauiste. Elle appartient à ce que Derrida, dans *De la grammatologie*, avait délimité comme « l’époque de Rousseau »” (48-49). However—and I will repeat this—it will be worth remembering that this Wagner who resembles Rousseau will always be something more like a Lacoue-Labartheian *figure* of Wagner. Certainly, Wagner’s body of work, considered on its own terms (and especially when one takes into account how it changed and developed over time), is not reducible to any single one of its moments.

double séance” in 1969 with regard to the philosophical (Platonic) notion of *mimesis*, but it more uniquely poses these questions of mimesis in terms of Mallarmé’s relation to Wagnerian music drama in ways that have not been adequately discussed. The experience of reading this seminar at the archives of L’Institute Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine exerted a significant influence on the arguments developed here, and for this reason it will be examined extensively below. In what follows, then, I will also build upon the previous chapter by continuing to trace out some generally unexplored “musico-literary” threads in Derrida’s early work from the late 1960s and early 1970s: taken together, the present chapter and the previous one will thus also offer an implicit commentary on the role that music and opera played at the outset of what eventually came to be called deconstruction.

2. On Necessity (a Gloss on *Oper und Drama*)

In his own way, Richard Wagner was also a theorist of decadence. His famous ideas about the *Gesamtkunstwerk*,¹¹² for instance, claim to respond to a decline of the arts away from their original and unified form in ancient Greek tragic drama (of which Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* represented the height). In his magnum (written) opus, *Oper und Drama*, he outlines how such a unity of arts would have originally functioned as a form of social expression in relation to nature:

Das Volk, das im Anfange sein Staunen über die weithin wirkenden Wunder der Natur in den Ausrufen lyrischer Ergriffenheit äußert, verdichtet, um den staunenerregenden Gegenstand zu bewältigen, die weitverzweigte Naturerscheinung zum Gott, und den Gott endlich zum Helden. Im diesem Helden, als dem gedrängten Bilde seines eigenen Wesens, erkennt es sich selbst, und seine Taten feiert es im Epos, im Drama aber stellt es

¹¹² This word had already been deployed by K.F.E. Trahdorff in 1827, and Wagner himself actually used the term very infrequently.

selbst sie dar. Der tragische Held der Griechen schritt aus dem Chor heraus und sprach zu ihm zurückgewandt: »Seht, so tut und handelt ein Mensch; was ihr in Meinungen und Sprüchen feiertet, das stelle ich euch als unwiderleglich wahr und notwendig dar« (OD 61).¹¹³

The question of Necessity and (the) Fate(s) will return again (as always) later. Here, though, one might take note of the fact that Wagner begins with a kind of great chain of being: wonder of nature becomes a god and a god becomes a mythic hero who reflects, like a mirror, the human back to itself. Such a reflection occurs, furthermore, not only on the level of narrative (*Epos*), but also and more especially in the presentation (*Darstellung*) of the tragedy itself, which draws its expressive force from the (melodic, linguistic, and kinesthetic) unity of its performance. In Wagner's view, however, beginning with Sophocles (KR 295), the unity of this ancient drama began to splinter and eventually collapsed, giving rise to a modern view of the arts that considers them to be separate from one another:

Mit dem späteren Verfall der Tragödie hörte die Kunst immer mehr auf, der Ausdruck des öffentlichen Bewußtseins zu sein: das Drama löste sich in seine Bestandteile auf: Rhetorik, Bildhauerei, Malerei, Musik usw. verließen den Reigen, in dem sie vereint sich bewegt hatten, um nun jede ihren Weg für sich zu gehen, sich selbständig, aber einsam, egoistisch fortzubilden. Und so war es bei der Wiedergeburt der Künste, daß wir zunächst auf diese vereinzelter griechischen Künste trafen, wie sie aus der Auflösung der Tragödie sich entwickelt hatten: das große griechische Gesamtkunstwerk durfte unserem

¹¹³ "In the beginning, the Folk expresses by cries of Lyric rapture its marvel at the constant wonders of Nature's workings; in its efforts to master the object of that marvel, it condenses (*verdichtet*) the many-membered show of Nature into a God, and finally its God into a Hero. In this Hero, as in the convex mirror of its being, it learns to know itself; his deeds it celebrates in Epos, but itself in Drama re-enacts them. The tragic Hero of the Greeks stepped out from amid the Chorus, and, turning back to face it, cried: 'Lo!—so does, so bears himself, a human being! What ye were hymning in wise saws and maxims, I set it up before you in all the cogence of Necessity'" (*Opera and Drama* 60).

verwilderten, an sich irren und zersplitterten Geiste nicht in seiner Fülle zuerst aufstoßen:
denn wie hätten wir es verstehen sollen? (KR 296).¹¹⁴

By the nineteenth century, then, the arts had fallen into decadence and disrepair, had declined from their once-glorious unity in Greek drama. Wagner took it upon himself to reunite these individually fragmented arts within his music dramas, recreating a lost *Gesamtkunstwerk* but in new and improved form,¹¹⁵ as what he called a “Kunstwerk der Zukunft [Artwork of the Future].” By bringing together the three “ungeborenen Schwestern [unborn sisters]” (KZ 36) of dance, music, and poetry (*Tanzkunst, Tonkunst, Dichtkunst*), and by infusing them with a life-force or *Lebensmacht* (KZ 14), Wagner’s drama would bring his audience together in an affective and vital communal relation—in a Romantic, universalizing feeling that Freud would later call “oceanic.”¹¹⁶

But again, Wagner sees this relation of the arts not as any simple or artificial combination; rather, he sought a more radically organic unity. In this regard, he even goes so far as to characterize his union of the arts in terms of the idea of *love*, which would unify feeling at the “boundaries of the senses:”

¹¹⁴ “With the subsequent downfall of Tragedy, Art became less and less the expression of the public conscience. The Drama separated into its component parts; rhetoric, sculpture, painting, music, &c., forsook the ranks in which they had moved in unison before; each one to take its own way, and in lonely self-sufficiency to pursue its own development. And thus it was that at the Renaissance of Art we lit first upon these isolated Grecian arts, which had sprung from the wreck of Tragedy. The great unitarian Art-work of Greece could not at once reveal itself to our bewildered, wandering, piecemeal minds in all its fulness; for how could we have understood it?” (“Art and Revolution” 52).

¹¹⁵ “New and improved” especially since Wagner’s music drama would ideally reach beyond class and economic barriers, whereas the Greek drama would have only been accessible and understandable to citizens (as opposed to slaves or barbarians).

¹¹⁶ Indeed, in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Wagner even directly analogizes music with the ocean, as that which binds and separates the “islands” of poetry and dance: “Das Meer trennt und verbindet die Länder: so trennt und verbindet die Tonkunst die zwei äußersten Gegensätze menschlicher Kunst, die Tans- und Dichtkunst” (KZ 51) [“The ocean binds and separates the land: so does Music bind and separate the two opposite poles of human Art, the arts of Dance and Poetry” (“The Artwork of the Future” 110)].

Die Grenzen der einzelnen Sinne sind aber auch ihre gegenseitigen Berührungspunkte, die Punkte, wo sie ineinander fließen, sich verständigen: gerade so berühren, verständigen sich die von ihnen hergeleiteten Fähigkeiten. Ihre Schranken heben sich daher in der Verständigung auf; nur was sich liebt, kann sich aber verständigen, und lieben heißt: den anderen anerkennen, zugleich also sich selbst erkennen; Erkenntnis durch die Liebe ist Freiheit, die Freiheit der menschlichen Fähigkeiten – *Allfähigkeit*. Nur die Kunst, die dieser Allfähigkeit des Menschen entspricht, ist somit *frei*, nicht die *Kunstart*, die nur von einer einzelnen menschlichen Fähigkeit herrührt (KZ 38).¹¹⁷

Here, Wagner theoretically grounds the point of agreement between the arts in an agreement between the senses (*Sinne*) produced by a universal faculty (*Allfähigkeit*) analogous with love. Later, in *Oper und Drama*, such a loving union even implies a figure of *marriage*, between the supposed femininity of music and the supposed masculinity of poetic language.¹¹⁸ Yet, as I will

¹¹⁷ “But the boundaries of the separate senses are also their joint meeting-points, those points at which they melt into one another and each agrees with each: and exactly so do the faculties that are derived from them touch one another and agree. Their confines, therefore, are removed by this agreement; but only those that love each other can agree, and ‘to love’ means: to acknowledge the other, and at like time to know one’s self. Thus Knowledge through Love is Freedom; and the freedom of man’s faculties is—*All-faculty*. / Only the Art which answers to this ‘all-faculty’ of man is, therefore, *free*; and not the *Art-variety*, which only issues from a single human faculty.” (“The Artwork of the Future” 97-98).

¹¹⁸ Consider the following passage, which illustrates Wagner’s gendering of the arts as well as his generally repugnant view of women: “Die Musik ist die Gebälerin, der Dichter der Erzeuger; und auf dem Gipfel des Wahnsinnes war die Musik daher angelangt, als sie nicht nur gebären, sondern auch zeugen wollte. / Die *Musik ist ein Weib*. / [...] Der Weib erhält volle Individualität erst im Momente der Hingebung. [...] Der Blick der Unschuld im Auge des Weibes ist der endlos klare Spiegel, in welchem der Mann so lange eben nur die allgemeine Fähigkeit zur Liebe erkennt, bis er sein eigenes Bild in ihm zu erblicken vermag: hat er sich darin erkannt, so ist auch die Allfähigkeit des Weibes zu der einen drängenden Notwendigkeit verdichtet, ihn mit der Allgewalt vollsten Hingebungseifers zu lieben” (OD 114-115) (“Music is the bearing woman, the Poet the begetter; and Music had therefore reached the pinnacle of madness, when she wanted, not only to bear, but also to *beget*. / *Music is a woman*. / [...] Woman first gains her full individuality in the moment of surrender. [...] The look of innocence in a woman’s eye is the endlessly pellucid mirror in which the man can see only the general faculty for love, till he is able to see in it the likeness of himself. When he has recognized himself therein, then also is the woman’s all-faculty condensed into one strenuous necessity, to love him with the all-dominant fervour of full surrender”) (*Opera and Drama* 111)].

now explore, the possibility for such a marriage of the arts would be first predicated upon a more general aesthetic relationship that Wagner pursues, between feeling and the understanding.¹¹⁹

In *Oper und Drama*, Wagner describes the goal of this more general relationship as a “Gefühleswerdung des Verstandes” (OD 203), a becoming-emotion of the intellect. Such a process would be, for Wagner, central to the dramatic poet-composer’s aim of “das Leben selbst aus seiner Notwendigkeit rechtfertigt: denn nur diese Notwendigkeit vermag das Gefühl zu verstehen, an das er sich mitteilt” (OD 203-204).¹²⁰ The dramatist would be faced with the challenge of condensing (*verdichten*) this vital necessity, through the “poetising intellect” (*des dichtenden Verstandes*), into the content of the drama (OD 206; *Opera and Drama* 211)—but because such a necessity only addresses itself to *feeling*, drama must also first address itself to feeling, temporarily eschewing the understanding or the intellect that will always be too abstract to comprehend it. Music drama’s relation to feeling thus cannot arise secondarily, in relation to a subject’s intellection of a content represented or imitated on stage; it must instead emerge in relation to the manner through which the dramatic content is intuited *in the first place*, before being fully grasped by the categories of the understanding. In this sense, Wagner (or at least the early Wagner of *Oper und Drama*) adopts an immediate appeal to feeling as his primary dramatic aim, precisely in order to spark another, more direct form of shared understanding in his audience:

Vor dem dargestellten dramatischen Kunstwerke darf nichts mehr dem kombinierenden Verstande aufzusuchen übrigbleiben: jede Erscheinung muß in ihm zu dem Abschlusse

¹¹⁹ The figure of marriage will be discussed in more detail below as it is taken up by Mallarmé, and subsequently by Derrida, in the word *hymen*. (Of course, Derrida’s use of the word “hymen” extends far beyond any allusion to Wagner; nevertheless, by tracing out this history, another important and somewhat overlooked inflection of the term will be brought into play.)

¹²⁰ “[...] vindicating Life itself out of the mouth of its own Necessity; for the Feeling, to which he addresses himself, can understand this Necessity alone” (*Opera and Drama* 208).

kommen, der unser Gefühl über sie beruhigt: denn in der Beruhigung dieses Gefühles, nach seiner höchsten Erregtheit im Mitgefühl, liegt die Ruhe selbst, die uns unwillkürlich das Verständnis des Lebens zuführt. Im Drama müssen wir *Wissende* werden durch *das Gefühl*. Der Verstand sagt uns: *so ist es* erst, wenn uns das Gefühl gesagt hat: *so muß es* sein. Dies Gefühl wird sich aber nur durch sich selbst verständlich: es versteht keine andere Sprache, als seine eigene. Erscheinungen, die uns nur durch den unendlich vermittelnden Verstand erklärt werden können, bleiben dem Gefühle unbegreiflich und störend. Eine Handlung kann daher nur dann im Drama erklärt werden, wenn sie dem Gefühle vollkommen gerechtfertigt wird, und die Aufgabe des dramatischen Dichters ist es somit, nicht Handlungen zu erfinden, sondern eine Handlung aus der Notwendigkeit des Gefühles der Art zu verständlichen, daß wir der Hilfe des Verstandes zu ihrer Rechtfertigung gänzlich entbehren dürfen (OD 204).¹²¹

Wagner thus wants his audience to feel the necessity of dramatic action according to the converse of the is-ought problem: “it is so because it must be so” rather than “it must be so because it is so.” This supplementary relationship or marriage of feeling and the intellect is perhaps what constitutes both the incredible intensity and the danger that each subtend Wagner’s Romantic operatic aesthetic (as well as, one could add, its countless inheritors in more recent musical and cinematic media). It offers the production of an inner presence, according to which intellect and feeling would be radically unified with one another in the perfect harmonization of

¹²¹ “In the presence of the Dramatic Artwork, nothing should remain for the combining Intellect to search for. Everything in it must come to an issue sufficient to set our Feeling at rest thereon; for in the setting-at-rest of this Feeling resides the repose, itself, which brings us an instinctive understanding of life. In the Drama, we must become *knowers* through *the Feeling*. The Understanding tells us: “*So is it,*” —only when the Feeling has told us: “*So must it be.*” Only through *itself*, however, does this Feeling become intelligible to itself: it understands no other language than its own. Things which can only be explained to us by the infinite accommodations of the Understanding, embarrass and confound the Feeling. In the Drama, therefore, an action can only be explained when it is completely vindicated by the Feeling; and it thus is the dramatic poet’s task, not to invent actions, but to make an action so intelligible through its emotional Necessity, that we may altogether dispense with the intellects’ assistance in its vindication” (*Opera and Drama* 208-209).

dramatic content and expressive form: “*Der Inhalt hat also ein im Ausdrucke stets gegenwärtiger, und dieser Ausdruck daher ein den Inhalt nach seinem Umfange stets vergegenwärtigender zu sein; denn das Ungegenwärtige erfaßt nur der Gedanke, nur das Gegenwärtige aber das Gefühl*” (OD 341).¹²²

One of the more significant avenues through which Wagner approached this kind of pure immanence of content and expression can be found—like Rousseau—in a search for an *Urmelodie* in the primal human voice: “[d]as älteste, ächteste und schönste Organ der Musik, das Organ, dem unser Musik allein ihr Dasein verdankt, ist die *menschliche Stimme*” (OD 122);¹²³ “—wir treffen endlich auf den lebendigen *menschlichen Sprachton*, der mit dem *Gesangtone* ein und dasselbe ist, und ohne den wir weder Klavier noch Literaturdrama kennen würden” (OD 124).¹²⁴ Throughout *Oper und Drama*, Wagner describes his attempt to recover this original voice by emphasizing a certain quality of vocal melliflence that he sometimes calls *Tonsprache* (as opposed to *Wortsprache* (cf. OD 218-232)). Consider for example the following passage, which reads almost like a summary of Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’origine des langues*:

Das ursprünglichste Äußerungsorgan des inneren Menschen ist aber die *Tonsprache*, als unwillkürlichster Ausdruck des von Außen angeregten inneren Gefühles. Eine ähnliche Ausdrucksweise, wie die, welche noch heute einzig den Tieren zu eigen ist, war jedenfalls auch die erste menschliche; und diese können wir uns jeden Augenblick ihrem Wesen nach vergegenwärtigen, sobald wir aus unsrer *Wortsprache* die stummen Mitlauter ausscheiden und nur noch die tönenden Laute übriglassen. In diesen Vokalen,

¹²² “The Content, then, has to be one that is ever present in the Expression, and therefore the Expression one that ever presents the Content in its fullest compass; for only Thought can grasp the absent, but only the present can be grasped by Feeling” (*Opera and Drama* 349).

¹²³ “The oldest, truest, most beautiful organ of music, the organ to which alone our music owes its being, is the human voice” (*Opera and Drama* 122).

¹²⁴ “We find at last the living tone of human speech, which is one and the same with the singing tone, and without which we should have known neither clavichord nor Literary-drama” (*Opera and Drama* 123).

wenn wir sie uns von den Konsonanten entkleidet denken, und in ihnen allein den mannigfaltigen und gesteigerten Wechsel innerer Gefühle nach ihrem verschiedenartigen, schmerzlichen oder freudvollen Inhalte, kundgegeben verstellen, erhalten wir ein Bild von der ersten Empfindungssprache der Menschen, in der sich das erregte und gesteigerte Gefühl gewiß nur in einer Fügung tönender Ausdrucks-laute mitteilen konnte, die ganz von selbst als Melodie sich darstellen mußte (OD 218-219).¹²⁵

In this way, Wagner describes the melody of a primordial *Tonsprache* (accompanied by natural rhythmic gestures—its “*rhythmische Melodie*” (OD 219)) as the central paradigm for the musico-linguistic expressivity that would occur in the artwork of the future.

However, such a naked and animalistic form of expression would still have to be “clothed” in an “ambient garment” (*ein umgebendes Gewand*) of consonantal articulation—that is, if one is to use language—but this “clothing” would have to be made so as to maintain an *organic* expressiveness. The best fabric for such a gown for expression would be, in Wagner’s opinion, medieval German alliterative verse—or, as it came to be known in the nineteenth century, *Stabreim* (a technique that he would deploy throughout *Der Ring des Nibelungen*¹²⁶):

Hierin äußerte sich die sinnlich dichtende Kraft der Sprache: sie war zur Bildung unterschiedener Ausdrucksmomente in den Sprachwurzeln dadurch gelangt, daß sie den im bloßen subjektiven Gefühlsausdrucke auf einen Gegenstand—nach Maßgabe seines

¹²⁵ “The primal organ-of-utterance of the inner man, however, is *Tone-speech*, as the most spontaneous expression of the inner Feeling stimulated from without. A mode of Expression similar to that still proper to the beasts was, in any case, alike the first employed by Man; and this we can call before us at any moment,—as far as its substance goes,—by removing from our Word-speech its dumb articulations (*die stummen Mitlauter*) [“its silent consonants,” one might say] and leaving nothing but the open [or “resounding”] sounds (*die tönenden Laute*). In these vowels, if we think of them as stripped of their consonants, and picture to ourselves the manifold and vivid play of inner feelings, with all their range of joy and sorrow, as given-out in them alone, we shall obtain an image of man’s first emotional language; a language in which the stirred and high-strung Feeling could certainly express itself through nothing but a joinery of ringing tones, which altogether of itself must take the form of Melody” (*Opera and Drama* 224-225).

¹²⁶ See Jeffrey L. Buller’s “The Thematic Role of *Stabreim* in Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.”

Eindruckes—verwendeten tönenden Laut in ein umgebendes Gewand stummer Laute gekleidet hatte, welches dem Gefühle als objektiver Ausdruck des Gegenstandes nach einer ihm selbst entnommenen Eigenschaft galt. Wenn die Sprache nun solche Wurzeln nach ihrer Ähnlichkeit und Verwandtschaft zusammenstellte, so verdeutlichte sie dem Gefühle in gleichem Maße den Eindruck der Gegenstände, wie den ihm entsprechenden Ausdruck durch gesteigerte Verstärkung dieses Ausdruckes, durch welche sie den Gegenstand selbst wiederum als einen verstärken, nämlich als einen an sich vielfachen, seinem Wesen nach durch Verwandtschaft und Ähnlichkeit aber einheitlichen bezeichnete. Dieses dichtende Moment der Sprache ist die *Alliteration* oder der *Stabreim*, in dem wir die uralteste Eigenschaft aller dichterischen Sprache erkennen (OD 221).¹²⁷

Wagner, in other words, here posits a non-arbitrary development of poetic language in relation to that which it expresses, according to which meaning and feeling would somehow coincide in the sounds used to express them. This original poetic language—especially the alliterative *Stabreim*—would not be merely abstract and ornamental, but would concretely produce a linguistic unity in which word, sound, and meaning are all organically “rooted” to one another (in an etymological sense).

¹²⁷ “Herein was evinced the sensuously composing (*sinnlich dichtende*) force of Speech. Through taking the open sound, employed for purely subjective expression of the feelings inspired by an object—in scale with its impression,—and clothing it with a garment of mute articulations, which stood to the Feeling as an objective expression borrowed from an attribute of the object itself, it had arrived at moulding different ‘moments’ of expression, in its speech-roots. Now, when Speech set these roots together according to their kinship and likeness, it made plain to the Feeling both the impression of the object and its answering expression, in equal measure, through an increased strengthening of that Expression; and hereby in turn, it denoted the object as itself a strengthened one,—namely, as an object strictly-speaking multiple, but *one* in essence through its kinship and likeness. This ‘composing moment’ of Speech is its *alliteration* or *Stabreim*, in which we recognise the very oldest attribute of all poetic speech” (*Opera and Drama* 227). In the cloth metaphor deployed here (which will return later in significant ways), one might locate perhaps Wagner’s biggest divergence from a traditional (though reductive) reading of Rousseau: although the former does theoretically “ground” his conception of humanity in nature, he does not prioritize nature as such, instead privileging *art* as the transformation (or clothing) of nature. In this regard, see Wagner’s essay “Kunst und Klima,” which implicitly extends Rousseau’s and Montesquieu’s eighteenth-century ideas on climate and art, but in his own late-Romantic idiom.

However—and again Wagner is rather like Rousseau here—at a certain point, this natural and non-arbitrary clothing of expressiveness with the word (or of *Tonsprache* with *Wortsprache*) gets supplanted by a more stilted and unnatural form of articulation, which uproots and interrupts this organic form so carefully poised between nature and artifice. At this moment, poetic language will have fallen prey to the evils of abstraction and double meaning, and its immediately expressive potential will have been lost:

Solange hierbei der Mensch die Natur noch im Auge behielt, und mit dem Gefühle sie zu erfassen vermochte, so lange erfand er auch noch Sprachwurzeln, die den Gegenständen und ihren Beziehungen charakteristisch entsprachen. Als er diesem befruchtenden Quelle seines Sprachvermögens im Drange des Lebens aber endlich den Rücken kehrte, da verdorrte auch seine Erfindungskraft, und er hatte sich mit dem Verrate, der ihm jetzt zum übermachten Erbe geworden, nicht aber mehr ein immer neu zu erwerbender Besitz war, in der Weise zu begnügen, daß er die ererbten Sprachwurzeln nach Bedürfnis für außernatürliche Gegenstände doppelt und dreifach zusammenfügte, um dieser Zusammenfügung willen sie wieder kürzte und zur Unkenntlichkeit namentlich auch dadurch entstellte, daß er den Wohllaut ihrer tönenden Vokale zum hastigen Sprachklänge verflüchtigte, und durch Häufung der, für die Verbindung unverwandter Wurzeln nötigen, stummen Laute das lebendige Fleisch der Sprache empfindlich verdörnte. Als die Sprache so das, nur durch das Gefühl zu ermöglichende, unwillkürliche Verständnis ihrer eigenen Wurzeln verlor, konnte sie in *diesen* natürlich auch nicht mehr den Betonungen jener nährenden Muttermelodie entsprechen (OD 223-224).¹²⁸

¹²⁸ “So long as this growing man still kept his eye on Nature, and was able to grasp her by his Feeling, so long also did he invent linguistic roots in characteristic keeping with the objects and their relations. But when amid the eventual stress of life he turned his back on this fruitful fountain of his powers of speech, then all his inventive-force was blighted, and he had to content himself with the harvest handed down to him but no longer a possession

Not only, therefore, have the various arts declined from their original unity in tragic drama, but linguistic expression in general has also withered away (*verdörrte*). As a result of such decay, Wagner claims that the more organic *Stabreim*—in which phrasing and meaning had once been united—has been replaced by a more reductive, abstract, and artificial “*End-reime* [end-rhyme]” (OD 224). An originally natural and non-arbitrary speech is thus supposed to have been estranged from itself by mediation, metaphor, and social convention, to have become more and more degraded from its original rootedness in natural melodic expressivity, until finally it only appeals to thought, as prose:

—Je verwickelter und vermittelnder aber endlich die Wortsprache verfahren mußte, um Gegenstände und Beziehungen zu bezeichnen, die nur der gesellschaftlichen Konvention, nicht aber der sich selbst bestimmenden Natur der Dinge angehörten; je mehr die Sprache bemüht sein mußte, Bezeichnungen für Begriffe zu finden, die, an sich von natürlichen Erscheinungen abgezogen, wieder zu Kombinationen dieser Abstraktionen verwandt werden sollten; je mehr sie hierzu die ursprüngliche Bedeutung der Wurzeln zu doppelt und dreifacher, künstlich ihnen untergelegter, nur noch zu *denkender*, nicht mehr zu *fühlender*, Bedeutung hinaufschrauben mußte, und je umständlicher sie sich den mechanischen Apparat herzustellen hatte, der diese Schrauben und Hebel bewegen und stützen sollte: desto widerspenstiger und fremder ward sie gegen jene *Urmelodie*, an die

to be ever-newly reaped; in such-wise that, according to his need, he took his heritage of speech-roots and pieced them double and trebly together for extranatural objects, pared them down for sake of this his piecing, and above all marred them past all knowledge by evaporating the ring of their sounding vowels to the hasty clang of Talk; while, by heaping-up the dumb articulations needful from combining un-related roots, he wrinkled grievously the living flesh of Speech. When Speech had thus lost an instinctive understanding of her own roots—only possible through Feeling,—she naturally could no longer answer *in these* to the intonations of that fostering mother-melody” (*Opera and Drama* 229).

sie endlich selbst die entfernteste Erinnerung verlor, als sie sich atem- und tonlos in das graue Gewühl der *Prosa* stürzen mußte (OD 224-225; emphasis added).¹²⁹

With his drama, then, Wagner attempted to rectify this degraded, prosaic and abstract state of language, and instead to wed a more immediately expressive poetic form (*Stabreim*) with musicality (in *Tonsprache*): in doing so, he hoped to produce an “Urmelodie” (cited above) as the basis for a direct and unmediated appeal to feeling in his dramatic expression. In this search for a primal expressiveness at a musico-poetic origin of language—in which *Wortsprache* and *Tonsprache*, consonant and vowel, intellect and feeling would exist in harmony with one another—a certain Wagner can be seen to echo a certain Rousseau, carrying the latter’s theories, nearly a century later, to their Romantic heights.

— Re-mark 1: Programme and Analysis

Of course, Wagner was not alone in the nineteenth century in his attempt to bring the arts together in relation to feeling. Alongside his efforts, for instance, there were those of the virtuoso pianist and composer Franz Liszt, who championed the genre of “programme music” with a similar goal in mind.¹³⁰ Describing Liszt’s project in his three-volume biography of the composer, Alan Walker writes that Liszt “believed that the language of music could be fertilized

¹²⁹ “—The more confusedly and circuitously this Word-speech must proceed, at last, to designate objects and relations belonging solely to social Convention, and no longer to the self-determining nature of things; the more she must busy herself to find terms for concepts which, themselves skimmed-off from natural phenomena, were to be employed in turn for combinations of these abstractions; the more, for this, she must screw up the original meaning of roots to accommodate a twofold and threefold meaning, ingeniously laid under them but merely to be *thought out*, no longer to be *felt*; and the more elaborately she had to equip the mechanical apparatus which was to bolster up, and set in motion, this system of screws and levers: so much the more shrewish and estranged did she become towards that primal melody (*Urmelodie*),—till at last she lost even the remotest memory of it, when, out of breath and reft of tone, she must flounder into the grey morass of *Prose*.” (*Opera and Drama* 230).

¹³⁰ While programme music existed throughout all the transformations in the history of Western art music, it was particularly popular in the Romantic era. And, while Liszt is often remembered as an important composer in the history of programme music, he was far from the only one. Consider, for instance, Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony (No. 6), Hector Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, or even the later symphonic poems of Richard Strauss. I am bringing up Liszt’s discussions of programme music here, however, because of his proximity to Wagner.

by the other arts, poetry and painting in particular” (*Franz Liszt* 358). But, according to Walker, this artistic cross-fertilization gave rise to popular misunderstanding and controversy around the idea of programme music, which was often mistakenly portrayed as merely advocating for compositions that imitated the contents of other arts: “No other article of Liszt’s faith has been so badly misrepresented as this last one. There are still musicians who think that he fostered the notion that music is a ‘representational’ art, that it can depict a poem, a picture, a flower, or a storm. Of course, it can do no such thing, and Liszt never said that it could. He is quite plain on the matter” (*ibid.*). To justify this claim, Walker cites a passage from Liszt’s general preface to his symphonic poems:

It is obvious that things which can appear only objectively to perception can in no way furnish connecting points to music; the poorest of apprentice landscape painters could give with a few chalk strokes a much more faithful picture than a musician operating with all the resources of the best orchestras. But if these same things are subjectivated to dreaming, to contemplation, to emotional uplift, have they not a kinship with music, and should not music be able to translate them into its mysterious language? (Liszt, *qtd. in* Walker, *ibid.*).

Liszt’s programme music thus did not attempt to represent the other arts, as is often assumed, but rather attempted to translate the expression of interior states between them, in a way that is similar to though not identical with Wagnerian drama¹³¹ (as well as, one might add, Rousseau’s

¹³¹ Cf. Dahlhaus’s “Wagner and Program Music.” Here Dahlhaus explores an ambivalence in Wagner’s support for Liszt’s position, according to which the former can sometimes be seen to be almost dismissive of Liszt’s ideas on programme music. However, as Dahlhaus argues (“Program” 18), if programme music sometimes appears to be superfluous for Wagner, this was not because Wagner was actually opposed to it; on the contrary, his ambivalence much more likely resulted from a certain anxiety of influence that existed between the two composers, each pursuing an “ideal drama” in their compositions (Dahlhaus, “Program” 19). In other words, Wagner was “not indecisive because the justification of program music with its aesthetic principles would have been incompatible with his own aesthetic principles, but just the opposite, because it agreed with them so completely that the

theory of musical imitation). Due to the similarity of their aesthetic presuppositions, then, Wagner and Liszt were not only friends, but allies who shared a similar understanding of the origin and purpose of music; the two therefore consistently defended one another against their mutual critics (Walker 359).

These two composers—though Wagner almost undoubtedly took things further—are usually portrayed as paragons of one of the two major schools of thought in the nineteenth-century musical-aesthetic debate that has been called the “War of the Romantics.” On the other side of this debate were more “conservative” figures like Robert and Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and the musicologist and critic Eduard Hanslick, each of whom more or less saw Wagner and Liszt as *enfants terribles*. Between these two factions there developed not only severe aesthetic disagreements but even personal animosities.¹³² Yet, despite their occasionally flaring tempers, the aesthetic position held by this other, more “conservative” side of the debate is famously *emotionless*. As opposed to Wagner’s music drama and Liszt’s programme music, both of which pursued emotional expressiveness as the basis for composition, Hanslick and his colleagues advocated for the idea of “absolute music:” this opposing approach was articulated perhaps most forcefully in Hanslick’s 1854 treatise *Vom Musikalisch-Schöne*, in which he makes the famous statement that the content of music and its potential for beauty cannot be seen to exist in reference to feeling or to anything other than its own “tönend bewegte Formen [tonally moving forms]” (Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch* 45). The first sentence of Hanslick’s text puts his

historico-philosophical design in which music drama forms the goal of music history seemed endangered” (Dahlhaus 20).

¹³² Consider, for instance, Liszt’s effective takeover of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, which had been edited previously by Robert Schumann; or, there was the “dreadful” dinner that the Schumanns hosted for Liszt in June 1848. As Walker describes it, Liszt “was passing through the city, [and] paid the Schumanns a surprise visit. Clara went to considerable pains to arrange a musical dinner in his honour. A time was set, the musicians assembled, but Liszt failed to appear. The exasperated players had almost finished a performance of Beethoven’s D-major Trio in the guest-of-honour’s absence when Liszt, in Clara’s words, ‘burst in at the door,’ two hours late, accompanied by Wagner” (Walker 341). Later in the evening, an emotionally intense argument apparently ensued, after which Clara is reported to have said “I have done with him [Liszt] forever” (ibid.).

critique plainly: “Die bisherige Behandlungsweise der musikalischen Ästhetik leidet fast durchaus an dem empfindlichen Mißgriff, daß sie sich nicht sowohl mit der Ergründung dessen, was in der Musik schön ist, als vielmehr mit der Schilderung der Gefühle abgibt, die sich unser dabei bemächtigen” (Hanslick *Vom Musikalisch* 1).¹³³

In making this argument (which I will not fully explore here), Hanslick first of all distinguishes between *Gefühle* (feeling) and *Empfindung* (sensation): *Empfindung*, for Hanslick, denotes only the apprehension of external stimuli, but as such provides the “Anfang und Bedingung des ästhetischen Gefallens und bildet erst die Basis des Gefühls” (*Vom Musikalisch* 5).¹³⁴ *Gefühle* is thus presented as a secondary emotional relationship to and interpretation of the stimuli presented to the subject through its sensation. On the basis of this distinction, Hanslick claims that a category error arises when feeling is uncritically confused with sensation: “in älteren Werken »Empfindung« genannt, was wir als »Gefühl« bezeichnen” (ibid.).¹³⁵ Having identified this confusion of terms, Hanslick goes on to argue that the beauty of music as such only appeals to sensation, before it is subjectively processed in terms of a reference to feeling that remains secondary: therefore, what will count for Hanslick are only the formal characteristics of music that constitute its beauty and that can be analyzed on their own terms. According to this view, to privilege feeling and expressivity in music is little more than an aesthetic mistake. And in this sense, Hanslick’s theories would also undermine the basis for Wagner and Liszt’s projects of organically joining music with the other arts (cf. Walker 362),

¹³³ “Musical aesthetics up to now has for the most part laboured under a serious methodological error, in that it occupies itself, not so much with careful investigation of that which is beautiful in music, but rather with giving an account of the feelings which take possession of us when we hear it” (Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* 1).

¹³⁴ “[...] the beginning and the prerequisite of aesthetical pleasure, and it constitutes initially the basis of feeling” (Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful* 4).

¹³⁵ “[...] the older aesthetical works have called *sensation* what we call *feeling*” (Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 4).

since their unification would be predicated precisely on a shared emotional expressiveness between them.

This hyper-formalist approach to music can often appear rather convincing—so much so that, as Joseph Kerman observed (314-315), Hanslick’s view inaugurated an entire tradition of detached analysis that dominated Western musicology for over a century, persisting through figures like Heinrich Schenker at least until the so-called “New Musicology” of the 1980s. However, despite what may or may not remain musicologically convincing in them, Hanslick’s criticisms of musical feeling nevertheless in some ways still neglect the question of expression by merely shifting it elsewhere: by portraying affect simply as a non-musical reaction to music—and by thereby potentially relegating it to a question of subjective interpretation—Hanslick only transforms the question of the musical expression of feeling (and its attendant theoretical problems) into one of *evocation*. Rather than externalizing and conveying supposedly interior emotional states, in other words, music would instead *draw out* emotional reactions, which would nevertheless still emerge organically within a subject, even if by a slightly altered mechanism. In this sense, absolute-musical critiques, while potentially quite convincing within a disciplinary and analytical framework, do little to problematize or even really to address the questions more broadly posed by Wagner’s aesthetics. And it is for this reason that it will be helpful to turn to Mallarmé below, to explore how he confronted and wrestled with these questions, rather than simply disavowing them.

— Re-mark 2: Three Figures of Dance

This second brief *divertissement* will present three additional Wagnerian confrontations, each of which will provide context for developments that will occur later in this chapter.

1. One of Wagner's responses to the criticisms of Hanslick¹³⁶ and others was to argue that they do not actually address music in its fullest form: for music to be presented in such a way, Wagner argued, it will need first to have been "severed from its roots in speech and dance, and thus [made] simply abstract" (Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 20).¹³⁷ Theorists of absolute music will have torn music from its ancient and intimate relationship with song and dance, and thus rendered it an empty shell of what it had been and could still be. In *Oper und Drama*, Wagner described such absolute instrumental music in the following way:¹³⁸

die Instrumentalmusik sich das Vermögen gewonnen, die harmonische Tanz- und Liedweise durch Zerlegung in kleinere und kleinste Teile, durch neues und mannigfaltig verschiedenartiges Aneinanderfügen, Ausdehnen oder Verkürzen dieser Teile, zu einer besonderen Sprache auszubilden, die so lange im höheren künstlerischen Sinne willkürlich und für das Reinmenschliche ausdrucksunfähig war, als in ihr das Verlangen nach klarem und verständlichem Wiedergeben bestimmter, individueller menschlicher Empfindungen sich nicht als einzig maßgebende Notwendigkeit für die Gestaltung jener melodischen Sprachteile kundtat (OD 71).¹³⁹

In this sense, for Wagner, theories of absolute music can never fully isolate music from that which they consider non-musical. At its best, instrumental music would still imitate the primal

¹³⁶ See also *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, in which Wagner parodies Hanslick through the character of Sixtus Beckmesser.

¹³⁷ See also Dahlhaus, "Wagner and Program Music" 6.

¹³⁸ In fact, as Dahlhaus points out, the term of "absolute music" was only retroactively ascribed to Hanslick, having been arguably coined first in its pejorative use by Wagner (who was himself indebted to the idea in Tieck, Wackenroder, and Hoffman (Dahlhaus *Absolute Music* 20)). According to Dahlhaus, Wagner first used the term in an 1846 program to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which he had "pieced together [...] from *Faust* quotations and esthetic commentaries" (*Absolute Music* 18).

¹³⁹ "Instrumental-music, taking the harmonic strains of Dance and Song, separating them into smaller and ever smaller portions, augmenting and diminishing these portions, and building them up again into constantly varying forms, had won itself an idiomatic speech; a speech which, in any higher artistic sense, however, was arbitrary and incapable of expressing the Purely-human, so long as the longing for a clear and intelligible portrayal of definite, individual human feelings did not become its only necessary measure for the shaping of those melodic particles" (*Opera and Drama* 70).

structures of song and dance, but at so many removes from their “purely human” origin (*das Reinmenschliche*): as Dahlhaus put it, “[m]imetic action [...] was not alien to instrumental music as Wagner understood it. Rather, it recalled its origin in the dance-form” (“Program Music” 14). Wagner thus turns Hanslick’s criticisms back upon him (even before the latter had published his famous text): absolute music will always have been derivative and mimetic—and Hanslick can, paradoxically, only absolutize music by fragmenting it.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche also famously criticized Wagner in terms of his relation to feeling. But, in doing so, he attacked Wagner from the other side, more or less on the basis of what Hanslick called sensation (*Empfindung*). For Nietzsche—or more precisely for the *later* Nietzsche, who had grown to hate Wagner in the same proportion that he had loved him initially—Wagner’s dramas couldn’t even rise to the level of a Hanslickian *Gefühle*,¹⁴⁰ since they only appealed to the decayed and decadent *nerves* of his audience. In this sense, he writes in *Der Fall Wagner* (in the more *décadent* French) that “*Wagner est une névrose*” (22). One might also consider similar statements such as:

[1.] —ich mag alle Musik nicht, deren Ehrgeiz nicht weiter geht als die Nerven zu überreden (Nietzsche, *Fall* 29).¹⁴¹

[2.] das Raffinement als Ausdruck des *verarmten* Lebens; immer mehr Nerven an Stelle des Fleisches (Nietzsche, *Fall* 47).¹⁴²

[3.] Am unheimlichsten freilich bleibt die Verderbniss der Nerven (Nietzsche, *Fall* 44).¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ To be sure, however, Nietzsche does not characterize his criticisms of Wagner in Hanslick’s terminology.

¹⁴¹ “—I dislike all music which aspires to nothing higher than to convince the nerves” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, 34).

¹⁴² “[...] refinement as an expression of impoverished life, ever more nerves in the place of muscle” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 51).

¹⁴³ “But the most ghastly thing of all is the deterioration of the nerves” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 49).

[4.] Wagner ist ein grosser Verderb für die Musik. Er hat in ihr das Mittel errathen, mude Nerven zu reizen,—er hat die Musik damit krank gemacht (Nietzsche, *Fall* 23).¹⁴⁴

For Nietzsche, Wagner's music thus offers an overwhelming oceanic feeling that appeals to the deteriorated nerves of its listeners, but which simultaneously deprives them of life and vitality. At the beginning of a section in *Nietzsche contra Wagner* called "Wagner als Gefahr [Wagner as Danger]," for instance, he describes this predicament in the following way:

Die Absicht, welche die neuere Musik in dem verfolgt, was jetzt, sehr stark, aber undeutlich, „unendliche Melodie“ genannt wird, kann man sich dadurch klar machen, dass man ins Meer geht, allmählich den sicheren Schritt auf dem Grunde verliert und sich endlich dem Elemente auf Gnade und Ungnade übergibt: man soll *schwimmen*. In der älteren Musik musste man, im zierlichen oder feierlichen oder feurigen Hin und Wieder, Schneller und Langsamer, etwas ganz Anderes, nämlich *tanzen*. Das hierzu nöthige Maass, das Einhalten bestimmter gleich wiegender Zeit- und Kraftgrade erzwang von der Seele des Hörers ein fortwährende *Besonnenheit* [...]. Schwimmen, Schweben—nicht mehr Gehen, Tanzen... Vielleicht ist damit das Entscheidende gesagt (Nietzsche, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* 421-422).¹⁴⁵

Wagner's somber dramas thus forget the sober, light-footed enthusiasm for life that a "healthier" music inspires. As opposed to his tragedies, Nietzsche—probably somewhat ironically—gives the example of Bizet's *Carmen*, an opera that "kommt leicht, biegsam, mit Höflichkeit daher. Sie

¹⁴⁴ "Wagner is a great corrupter of music. With it, he found the means of stimulating tired nerves,—and in this way he made music ill" (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 28).

¹⁴⁵ "The aim after which more modern music is striving, which is now given the strong but obscure name of 'unending melody,' can be clearly understood by comparing it to one's feelings on entering the sea. Gradually one loses one's footing and one ultimately abandons oneself to the mercy or fury of the elements: one has to swim. In the solemn, or fiery, swinging movement, first slow and then quick, of old music—one had to do something quite different; one had to dance. The measure which was required for this and the control of certain balanced degrees of time and energy, forced the soul of the listener to continual sobriety of thought. [...] It was [sic] no longer a matter of walking or dancing,—we must swim, we must hover... This perhaps decides the whole matter (Nietzsche, "Nietzsche contra Wagner" 61).

ist liebenswürdig, sie *schwitzt* nicht” (*Fall* 12).¹⁴⁶ Such danceable music is supposed to be far from Wagner’s sea of endless assaults on the nerves, in which one can hardly stay afloat. Citing this kind of neurosis, Nietzsche diagnoses Wagner as “[d]er *Künstler der décadence* [the artist of *decadence*]” (*Fall* 21) par excellence, calling him a master of “dumpfen hieratischen Wohlgerüchen [vague hieratic fragrances]” (*Fall* 43) and “*kleinen Unendlichen* [*little infinities*]” (*ibid.*): in Wagner, “[d]as Ganze lebt überhaupt nicht mehr: es ist zusammengesetzt, gerechnet, künstlich, ein Artefakt” (Nietzsche, *Fall* 27).¹⁴⁷ One might suppose that it is precisely for these reasons, for these hieratic fragrances and sickly nerves, that Wagner proved so enticing for Mallarmé—who, by the time of *Der Fall Wagner*, had already published his own works on the composer.

3. Indeed, another earlier juncture of dancing and the nerves would go on to play a significant if indirect role in shaping Mallarmé’s own poetic reception of Wagnerian drama. This influence began in March 1861, when *Tannhäuser* debuted in France at the Paris Opéra, after which Wagner was forced to pull his work from the stage following just three performances. For a long time, the story of this troubled reception of *Tannhäuser* was understood to have been one of nationalist and sexist chauvinism regarding the role that *ballet* played (or failed to play) in the

¹⁴⁶ “[...] comes forward lightly, gracefully, stylishly. It is lovable, it does not sweat” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 19). The way in which Nietzsche describes Bizet is interesting, especially when considered in relation to the philosophical tendency to link music to climate, which has been discussed above (variously in relation to Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Wagner, for example). He writes, for instance, of how “Il faut méditerraniser la musique” (Nietzsche, *Fall* 16); or of how Bizet’s “Heiterkeit ist afrikanisch [gaity is African]” (*Fall* 15); or “[...]—zu dieser südlicheren, bräuneren, verbrannten Sensibilität... Wie die gelben Nachmittage ihres Glücks uns wohlthun! Wir blicken dabei hinaus: sahen wir je das Meer glätter? — Und wie uns der maurische Tanz beruhigend zuredet!” (*ibid.*) [“—of this southern, tawny, sunburnt sensitiveness... What a joy the golden afternoon of its happiness is to us! When we look out, with this music in our minds, we wonder whether we have ever seen the sea so calm. And how soothing is this Moorish dancing!” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 20-21)].

¹⁴⁷ “The whole no longer lives at all: it is composed, reckoned up, artificial, a fictitious thing” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 33). Nietzsche even compares Wagner’s characters to the superficial delusions of Madame Bovary (*Fall* 34).

opera. Here, for instance, is Annegret Fauser's vivid description of the traditional understanding of the Paris public's initial reaction to the *Tannhäuser*:

In the standard telling of the story, Wagner, the greatest German composer since Beethoven, came to Paris to have his *Tannhäuser* performed on the stage of the Opéra, then the most important music theater in Europe. Unfortunately, the administration of the house asked for revisions, in particular the addition of a ballet in act 2, in order to accommodate the taste of its spoiled audience. Aristocrats habitually attended the opera after dinner in time to see their favorite ballerinas perform on stage before the subsequent, more private entertainment in bed. Wagner, however, steadfastly refused to compromise his artistic integrity on the altar of convention. Nevertheless, as a concession to Parisian taste, he used the presence of a well-trained corps de ballet to revise the Venusberg scene in act 1, significantly enlarging the scope of the bacchanal. Alas: Parisian prejudice prevailed when the members of the Jockey Club were prevented by Wagner's artistic vision in act 2 from ogling their favorite ballerinas. They took their revenge, whistling and shouting throughout the remainder of the opera, drowning out Wagner's music with their racket. This scandalous behavior only escalated during the next two performances. A cruel cabal in the French press further encouraged the opera's rejection by Parisian audiences [...] (230).

Although, as Fauser goes on to explain, the Parisian public's rejection of Wagner's opera can be understood to have occurred for significantly more complicated reasons, this narrative nevertheless predominated for many years afterward, and so would have partially informed Mallarmé's understanding of the scandal. He was just turning 19 years old at the time.

This rejection of *Tannhäuser* widened the polarization of Wagner's French audience along its fault lines, leading many to mock him and others to even more staunchly embrace him. For instance, squarely in the former category, an April issue of *Le Journal amusant* would even prefigure some of Nietzsche's later and more serious criticisms with their parody of *Tannhäuser*, published under the title of *Le Tanne-aux-airs ou La Guerre aux chanteurs: Scie musicale en trois actes et quatre tableaux, par M. Vagues-Nerfs* (*Journal Amusant* No. 276).¹⁴⁸ But Wagner also had his defenders, and foremost among them was the poet Charles Baudelaire, who wrote the most significant and impassioned defense of Wagner in the wake of this scandal, publishing it as a pamphlet about a month afterward, under the title *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*. In this little pamphlet, he shames his compatriots for the ways in which they refused to understand and appreciate the greatness of Wagner's art, while also commenting upon, among other texts, Liszt's *Lohengrin et Tannhäuser de Richard Wagner* and Wagner's own *Lettre sur la musique*¹⁴⁹ (which Wagner had sent to Baudelaire as an advance copy already in 1860, despite having some misgivings about the poet¹⁵⁰). As the following sections will explore in more detail, Baudelaire's writing on Wagner would go on to have a significant impact on Mallarmé, by way of an entire tradition of French Wagnerism that was heavily influenced if not entirely determined by this essay and the events of 1861.

¹⁴⁸ *Tanne-aux-airs* and *M. Vagues-nerfs* are French homophones with *Tannhäuser* and *M. Wagner*, respectively. For more on these parodies of Wagner, see Raymond Furness (127), who also cites other titles such as *Yameinherr* and the *Kakophonie der Zukunft* (a work written for "harps, voices, and performing dogs"). Similar characterizations of Wagner in terms of *vagues nerfs* persisted in various forms throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, through Nietzsche (see above) as well as other lesser known writers like Henri Lichtenberger, who claimed that "[l]a gloire de Wagner c'est d'avoir trouvé la langue qui correspondait le mieux à l'impressionnabilité nerveuse plus affinée de la seconde moitié du siècle" (qtd. in Hartman, 9). Indeed, from neurasthenia to early Freud, the nerves in general played a fascinating role in the cultural life of nineteenth-century Europe. See, for instance, Carter 66-67. In this regard as well, the nerves will even return with Mallarmé below.

¹⁴⁹ Wagner wrote *Lettre sur la musique* originally in French; in it, he explicates many of his central ideas as he had first outlined them in works like *Oper und Drama*. Additionally, as Heath Lees observes (MW 69-70), Baudelaire was also working from an English translation of *Oper und Drama*.

¹⁵⁰ As Elwood Hartman describes it, "Wagner thought Baudelaire odd and pitiful" (20).

3. Baudelaire's Synaesthetics

Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris provides not only a compelling and quite beautiful defense of Wagner, but it is also masterful study in Baudelaire's general understanding of "the correspondence among the arts and the senses" (cf. Roedig 128). The text thus deserves to be read for its own sake, beyond its commentary on the *Tannhäuser* debacle, but there will not be sufficient space to do it justice here. Because of its importance to both Mallarmé and Derrida, however, it will be important to recall a few of the claims Baudelaire makes.

There are at least two tendencies that Baudelaire draws out of Wagner in his pamphlet.¹⁵¹ On the one hand, again, a certain Rousseauianism can be heard in his descriptions of the composer, such as: "Il en résulte, dans quelque sujet qu'il traite, une solennité d'*accent superlative*. Par *cette passion* il ajoute à chaque chose je ne sais quoi de surhumain ; par cette passion il comprend tout et fait tout comprendre (OCB2 806-807; emphasis added). Or again, Wagner "n'avait jamais cessé de répéter que la musique (dramatique) devait *parler le sentiment*, s'adapter au sentiment avec la même exactitude que la parole, mais évidemment d'une autre manière, c'est-à-dire exprimer la partie indéfinie du sentiment que la parole, trop positive, ne peut pas rendre" (OCB2 786; emphasis added). In this respect, Baudelaire even makes a direct comparison of Wagner's writing with one of Rousseau's contemporaries—Denis Diderot:

En feuilletant la *Lettre sur la musique*, je sentais revivre dans mon esprit, comme par un phénomène d'écho mnémonique, différents passages de Diderot qui affirment *que la vraie musique dramatique ne peut pas être autre chose que le cri ou le soupir de la passion noté et rythmé*. Les mêmes problèmes scientifiques, poétiques, artistiques, se reproduisent sans cesse à travers les âges, et Wagner ne se donne pas pour un inventeur

¹⁵¹ It would be important to recall here that, as Lacoue-Labarthe shows, Baudelaire's Wagner "n'est pas Wagner" (*Musica Ficta* 77).

mais simplement pour le confirmateur d'une ancienne idée qui sera sans doute plus d'une fois encore, alternativement vaincue et victorieuse (OCB2 788; emphasis added).

For Baudelaire, then, Wagner's approach to expressivity provides a particular answer to a much broader and perennial set of questions, many of which can be identified already in the eighteenth century and very much earlier. By this logic, the passages in Diderot that Baudelaire cites would therefore inevitably also demand to be considered alongside Rousseau's own thought and *its* history—and in this sense, it is possible to suggest that these *échos mnémoniques* might even imply Diderot's own references to the *Querelle des Bouffons* in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in which the character "Lui" advocates for the Rousseauian ideal of passionate accent and simple, expressive language:

C'est qu'il n'y a rien là qui puisse servir de modèle au chant. [...] C'est au *cri animal de la passion*, à dicter la ligne qui nous convient. Il faut que ces expressions soient pressées les unes sur les autres ; il faut que la phrase soit courte ; que le sens en soit coupé, suspendu ; que le musicien puisse disposer du tout et de chacune de ses parties ; en omettre un mot, ou le répéter ; y en ajouter un qui lui manque ; la tourner et retourner, comme un polype, sans la détruire [...]. Or n'allez pas croire que le jeu des acteurs de théâtre et leur déclamation puissent nous servir de modèles. Fi donc. Il nous le faut plus énergique, moins maniéré, plus vrai. Les discours simples, *les voix communes de la passion*, nous sont d'autant plus nécessaires que la langue sera plus monotone, aura moins d'accent. *Le cri animal ou de l'homme passionné leur en donne* (Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau* 209; emphasis added).

Diderot wrote this strange dialogue in the 1760s and 70s, after the *Querelle* and as Rousseau was penning his own *Essai*. However, it was not actually publicly available in Europe until after it

had been translated and published in German by Goethe (Bonnet 7), whose translation would have helped to influence the development of the same Romantic vision of music to which Baudelaire ultimately responded in his essay.

But, on the other hand, if Baudelaire's essay figures Wagnerian drama as almost hyperbolically expressive, it also depicts the relationship between the arts through which this dramatic expression would take place as a form of *impossible translation*.¹⁵²

J'ai souvent entendu dire que la musique ne pouvait pas se vanter de *traduire* quoi que ce soit avec certitude, comme fait la parole ou la peinture. Cela est vrai dans une certaine proportion, mais n'est pas tout à fait vrai. Elle *traduit* à sa manière, et par les moyens qui lui sont propres. Dans la musique, comme dans la peinture et même dans la parole écrite, qui est cependant le plus positif des arts, *il y a toujours une lacune* complétée par l'imagination de l'auditeur. / Ce sont sans doute ces considérations qui ont poussé Wagner à considérer l'art dramatique, c'est-à-dire la réunion, la coïncidence de plusieurs arts, comme l'art par excellence, le plus synthétique et le plus parfait (OCB2 781-782; emphasis added).¹⁵³

Here, like Liszt, Baudelaire does not argue that music would be capable of simply transcribing the contents of the other arts with the clarity and precision of language or painting; instead (and one might say that here Baudelaire is unlike Liszt), he attempts to emphasize and generalize a “gap” (*lacune*) inherent in all translation, which might be sometimes typified in music, but which also exists within language and visual art.

¹⁵² Lacoue-Labarthe also underscores the importance of the idea of translation in Baudelaire's reading of Wagner (*Musica Ficta* 80-81).

¹⁵³ See also: “Il possède l'art de *traduire*, par des gradations subtiles, tout ce qu'il y a d'excessif, d'immense, d'ambitieux, dans l'homme spirituel et naturel. Il semble parfois, en écoutant cette musique ardente et despotique, qu'on retrouve peintes sur le fond des ténèbres, *déchiré par la rêverie*, les vertigineuses conceptions de l'opium” (OCB2 785; emphasis added).

Such translational lacunae, which Mallarmé will later exploit a great deal, might also be understood in terms of the sensual ambiguities of Baudelaire's own poetic notion of "correspondance." And indeed, in this regard, he even reproduces the first two quatrains of his famous poem "Correspondances" in *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris* in order to describe his idiomatic understanding of the composer. Therefore, before moving into the Mallarméan text, it will be worth quoting, at some length, the specific passage from this pamphlet within which he cites this poem:

M'est-il permis à moi-même de raconter, de rendre avec des paroles la traduction inévitable que mon imagination fit du même morceau, lorsque je l'entendis pour la première fois, les yeux fermés, et que je me sentis pour ainsi dire enlevé de terre? Je n'oserais certes pas parler avec complaisance de mes *rêveries*, s'il n'était pas utile de les joindre ici aux *rêveries* précédentes. Le lecteur sait quel but nous poursuivons : démontrer que la véritable musique suggère des idées analogues dans des cerveaux différents. D'ailleurs, il ne serait pas ridicule ici de raisonner *a priori*, sans analyse et sans comparaisons ; car ce qui serait vraiment surprenant, c'est que le son *ne pût pas* suggérer la couleur, que les couleurs *ne pussent pas* donner l'idée d'une mélodie, et que le son et la couleur fussent impropres à traduire des idées ; les choses s'étant toujours exprimées par une analogie réciproque, depuis le jour où Dieu a proféré le monde comme une complexe et indivisible totalité.

La nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,

Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Je poursuis donc. Je me souviens que, dès les premières mesures, je subis une de ces impressions heureuses que presque tous les hommes imaginatifs ont connues, par le rêve, dans le sommeil. Je me sentis délivré des *liens de la pesanteur*, et je retrouvai par le souvenir l'extraordinaire *volupté* qui circule dans *les lieux hauts* (notons en passant que je ne connaissais pas le programme cité tout à l'heure). Ensuite je me peignis involontairement l'état délicieux d'un homme en proie à une grande rêverie dans une solitude absolue, mais une solitude avec *un immense horizon* et une *large lumière diffuse* ; *l'immensité* sans autre décor qu'elle-même. Bientôt j'éprouvai la sensation d'une *clarté* plus vive, *d'une intensité de lumière* croissant avec une telle rapidité, que les nuances fournies par le dictionnaire ne suffiraient pas à exprimer ce surcroît toujours renaissant d'ardeur et de blancheur. Alors je conçus pleinement l'idée d'une âme se mouvant dans un milieu lumineux, d'une extase faite de volupté et de connaissance, et planant au-dessus et bien loin du monde naturel (OCB2 784-785; emphasis Baudelaire's).

Many of the terms of Mallarmé's approach to Wagner are, as we will see below, already prefigured in this passage, especially in its metaphors of *light*. And indeed, much of this chapter so far has been rather prefatory. But, as Baudelaire himself wrote, "[j]e n'oserais certes pas parler avec complaisance de mes *rêveries*, s'il n'était pas utile de les joindre ici aux *rêveries* précédentes."

4. Mallarmé's *Reverie*

Although several other French writers engaged with Wagner's work (such as Nerval, Champfleury, Banville, and Gautier¹⁵⁴), it was Baudelaire's essay that provided the major catalyst for the development of a first wave of "literary Wagnerism" in France that, after 1861, would exhibit a devotion to the composer rivalled only by his audiences in Bayreuth. A major torchbearer of this Wagnerism after Baudelaire was the poet Catulle Mendès (Lees, MW 98-99), who also happened to be a friend of Mallarmé. Over the years, Mendès went on to develop romantic relationships with two other literary Wagnerites, namely Judith Gautier (the daughter of Théophile) and Augusta Holmès. Mallarmé himself had already known Holmès since the 1850s (Lees, MW 18), and it was she who had first helped to convey to him "the essence of Wagner's image of music" (Lloyd 152; also qtd. in Lees, MW op. cit.). Through friendships like these, Mallarmé would have been in communication with a large number of lettered Wagnerians, such as Léon Dierx, George Moore, Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, and many others (Lees, MW 17 and passim). Mallarmé therefore would have already been familiar with Wagner, albeit in a secondhand way, long before ever writing about him.¹⁵⁵

Along with Mendès, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam in particular became a major influence on Mallarmé's reception of Wagner. Together, Mendès and Villiers had made multiple pilgrimages to Wagner's villa in Tribschen, Switzerland, in order to meet directly with the composer and to listen to his music:

There [in Tribschen], with Mendès' first wife Judith Gautier, the two friends received joyous confirmation of their discipleship, plus exciting insights into Wagner's later ideas,

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 of Hartman's *French Literary Wagnerism*; also "Gautier the Music Critic: A Successful Failure."

¹⁵⁵ This is Heath Lees's argument in his recent and important book, *Mallarmé and Wagner: Music and Poetic Language*, which provides a much needed and extremely interesting exploration of Mallarmé's Wagnerian milieu—even if I tend to disagree with some of his claims, for instance his tendency to interpret Mallarmé's poetry through an overly literal understanding of music, even sometimes using scores to do so (see Lees 191).

to say nothing of the many ‘preview’ sessions of Wagner’s current works, which the composer performed heartily, as both singer and pianist (Lees, MW 97).

Lees even recounts how, upon returning from one such visit in 1870, “after attending the first performance of *Die Walküre* at Munich, Mendès, Judith Gautier, and Villiers visited Mallarmé’s Avignon household as a welcome detour on their way home” (MW 101). However, upon receiving them, Mallarmé’s apparent concern with his own *Igitur* seems to have somewhat unsettled Mendès—who was disappointed by his friend’s lack of shared enthusiasm for Wagner—and caused him to leave Mallarmé’s home sooner than he had planned (MW 101-102). This visit would have been a first indication that Mallarmé, despite his undeniable admiration for Wagner’s music, could not so easily be counted among the latter’s devotees.

In the mid-1880s, a “second wave” of French Wagnerism erupted, this time led by figures like Edouard Dujardin, the editor (along with Téodor de Wyzewa) of a short-lived journal called *La Revue wagnérienne*.¹⁵⁶ By then, Mallarmé had become much better known as a writer, and his famous *Mardis* had already been underway for some years (Pearson, *Mallarmé* 118-119). At the same time, the conductor Charles Lamoureux, a major proponent of Wagner in the fin-de-siècle French musical world, began organizing and conducting unstaged performances of excerpts from Wagner’s operas.¹⁵⁷ At Dujardin’s invitation (Lees, MW 11), Mallarmé attended one of these *Concerts Lamoureux* (as they came to be called) on Good Friday, 1885. Joris-Karl Huysmans was in attendance as well. On the program that evening were the overtures to *Rienzi*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, and *Tannhauser*, in addition to preludes from *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde* and excerpts from *Lohengrin*, *Götterdämmerung*, and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. As Lees describes it, this particular evening “amounted to the most comprehensive single

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Lees, MW 25. Dujardin was also the self-proclaimed inventor of “stream of consciousness” writing, and an influence on James Joyce, by way of his novel *Les lauriers sont coupés*.

¹⁵⁷ See the Appendix to Volume 2 of Adolphe Jullien’s *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works*.

concert-performance of Wagner's works in France up till that time, even taking the composer's own Paris concerts of 1860 into account" (MW 11). Although Huysmans was reportedly rather bored (Bernard 23), Mallarmé—so the story goes—was deeply moved by the music, so much so that he continued to attend these concerts for years. Paul Valéry described Mallarmé's relation to the *Concerts Lamoureux* as one of "sublime jealousy:" "Mallarmé sortait des concerts plein d'une sublime jalousie. Il cherchait désespérément à trouver les moyens de reprendre pour notre art ce que la trop puissante Musique lui avait dérobé de merveilles et d'importance" (Valéry, qtd. in Bernard 23). Again, then, Mallarmé's reaction to Wagner was ambivalent, this time between admiration and jealousy.

After the 1885 Good Friday concert in particular, Dujardin asked Mallarmé to make a contribution to the first volume of *La Revue wagnérienne*. And, although he was somewhat reticent to do so, Mallarmé ultimately assented.¹⁵⁸ The two contributions that he subsequently made to the journal would be the only pieces that he explicitly dedicated to Wagner's work, though Wagner nevertheless appears in many other places throughout his writing, from the early *Hérésies artistiques: L'Art pour tous* to *Divagations*. The first piece that Mallarmé wrote for *La Revue*—which appeared just over four months later, on August 8, 1885, under the title of "Richard Wagner: Rêverie d'un poète français"—was a work that Mallarmé described as "moitié article, moitié poème en prose" (OCM2 1622). The second piece, a sonnet simply titled "Hommage," appeared exactly four months after the first, on the January 8, 1886, alongside several other poems in the final issue of the first volume of *La Revue*, itself subtitled *Hommage à Wagner*. Because Derrida writes on this poem at more length in his seminar, and because the poem in many ways requires a prior reading of the "Rêverie," it will be discussed in a later section.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. OCM2 1622.

Although Mallarmé never saw Wagner's dramas performed, he had prepared to write the "Rêverie" in other, more indirect ways. He had heard the music performed, and—through his social circles and through texts like Baudelaire's *Tannhäuser* essay—he also would have been relatively familiar with *a version of the composer's ideas*. Moreover, in a letter to Gustave Kahn from May 1885, he described how, in preparing to write his piece for *La Revue*, he was also finally getting around to studying a collection of Wagner's works that he had been meaning to read, he says, for 15 years: Bertrand Marchal notes that this particular book was almost certainly the 1861 *Quatre poèmes d'opéras traduits en prose française, précédés d'une lettre sur la musique par Richard Wagner* (ibid.), which contains Wagner's *Lettre sur la musique* as well as French translations of the librettos of *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *Tristan und Isolde* (printed under the traditional French title of *Tristan et Iseult*). Rebecca Saunders further suggests that the "Rêverie" might also have constituted a partial response to Wagner's essay on Beethoven, the end of which appeared alongside Mallarmé's piece in the same issue of *La Revue wagnérienne*. Certainly this essay of Wagner's came to bear some significance for Mallarmé, as a copy of it was found sitting on his writing desk after his death over a decade later (Saunders 1113).

As with "La Musique et les Lettres" (a lecture that Mallarmé would deliver in 1894 at Oxford and Cambridge), the "Rêverie" also frequently couches his more general observations about music and poetry in terms of national difference (hence the qualifier "d'un poète français"). Lacoue-Labarthe thus writes that, in the "Rêverie," "[i]l y a là, c'est l'évidence, toute une scène nationale, qu'il ne faut surtout pas sous-estimer" (*Musica Ficta* 130). Saunders also observes that Mallarmé's seemingly nationalistic tone was likely informed by yet another Wagnerian "scandal" taking place in Paris as Mallarmé was writing, which had arisen in

response to the impresario Léon Carvalho's attempt to stage *Lohengrin* at the Opéra-Comique. In light of political resentments harbored after the loss of the Franco-Prussian War—and especially in light of Wagner's subsequent *Eine Kapitulation*—Carvalho's attempted staging was seen by some as an insult to France (ibid.). But, importantly, Mallarmé's article does not reinforce this nationalist opposition so much as confound it, not least because of the manner in which it praises Wagner's work within the context of this scandal.

The "Rêverie" begins by figuring Wagner—and certainly, again, this is a *figure* of Wagner, as Lacoue-Labarthe says¹⁵⁹—as issuing a challenge to poets and to poetry in general: "Singulier défi qu'aux poètes dont il usurpe le devoir avec la plus candide et splendide bravoure, inflige Richard Wagner!" (OCM2 154). Wagner threatens to usurp the role of literature since through his drama he wants to suffuse poetic language with the force of music, producing a form of art that would exceed them both (see Section 2 above). This *synthetic* process, for Mallarmé, would occur in a specific sense:

Un simple adjonction orchestrale change du tout au tout, annulant son principe même, l'ancien théâtre, et c'est comme strictement allégorique, que l'acte scénique maintenant, vide et abstrait en soi, impersonnel, a besoin, pour s'ébranler avec vraisemblance, de l'emploi du vivifiant effluve qu'épand la Musique (OCM2 155).

Music—or, more precisely, a mix of musicality with primal linguistic vociferation—*animates* the action and the language on stage such that they would no longer simply represent a scene occurring elsewhere, at another time and place. The representational and referential content of a traditional theater would be transformed instead into the "allegorical" vehicle for the immediacy of musical expressiveness: "vide et abstrait en soi, impersonnel," this content empties itself in order to be filled by the "vivifiant effluve" of music. In this sense, Mallarmé writes that "un

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe's "Avant-propos" to *Musica Ficta: Figures de Wagner*.

auditoire éprouvera cette impression que, si l'orchestre cessait de déverser son influence, le mime resterait, aussitôt, statue" (ibid.). The mime, or the supposedly "mimetic" element of the drama, then, becomes the mold for a molten musical expressivity that Wagner pours (*déverser*) into his verse. And, in the "Rêverie," Mallarmé also comes to figure this union of poetic language and musical expressivity as a kind of *marriage*: "des deux éléments de beauté qui s'excluent et, tout au moins, l'un l'autre, s'ignorent, le drame personnel et la musique idéale, *il effectua l'hymen*" (ibid; emphasis added).¹⁶⁰

To the degree that such a union of the arts is felicitous, for Mallarmé, it produces a "fusion de ces formes de plaisir disparates" (OCM2 156), mixing color and line and timbre and theme in a powerful and even dreamlike immediacy, through which Wagner's audience loses itself:

Maintenant, en effet, une musique qui n'a de cet art que l'observance des lois très complexes, seulement d'abord le flottant et l'infus, confond les couleurs et les lignes du personnage avec les timbres et les thèmes en une ambiance plus riche de Rêverie que tout air d'ici-bas, *déité costumée aux invisibles plis d'un tissu d'accords* ; ou va l'enlever de sa vague de Passion, au déchaînement trop vaste vers un seul, le précipiter, le tordre : et le soustraire à sa notion, perdue devant cet afflux surhumain, pour la lui faire ressaisir quand il domptera tout par le chant, *jailli dans un déchirement* de la pensée inspiratrice (OCM2 156 ; emphasis added).

¹⁶⁰ Mallarmé recognizes that this marriage that he describes—of the musical with the dramatic, the ideal with the personal, feeling with intellect, immediacy with mediation, etc.—can (like all marriage) never produce a total union, but can theoretically only achieve a juxtaposition: "Quoique philosophiquement elle ne fasse là encore que se juxtaposer, la Musique (je somme qu'on insinue d'où elle poind, son sens premier et sa fatalité) pénètre et enveloppe le Drame de par l'éblouissante volonté et s'y allie" (OCM2 156). The questions of juxtaposition and of this *hymen* will be discussed in more detail below.

The final lines of this passage are the approximate point in the article at which Mallarmé begins to pivot away from praising Wagner's position, in order to distinguish it from his own. In short, what Mallarmé will oppose in his picture of the Wagnerian aesthetic will be the moment when the composer "domptera tout par le chant," when Wagner pierces or penetrates the vagueness of his *vague de Passion* in order to instill in his audience a *sensus communis*, creating an aesthetic community into which each member would be affectively initiated,¹⁶¹ "*Wissende werden durch das Gefühl*" (Wagner, OD 204, cited above):

Avec une piété antérieure, un public, pour la seconde fois depuis les temps, hellénique d'abord, maintenant germain, considère le secret, représenté, d'origines. Quelque singulier bonheur, neuf et barbare, l'assoit : devant le voile mouvant la subtilité de l'orchestration, à une magnificence que décore sa genèse (OCM2 156-157).

The drama moves from the barbarousness of feeling ("barbare:" speaking a language one cannot understand¹⁶²) to the shared secret and reaffirmed origin of the polis.

At the end of the "Rêverie," in a tone undecidably sincere and ironic, Mallarmé sums up his position:

Voilà, pourquoi, Génie! Moi, l'humble qu'une logique éternelle asservit, ô Wagner, je souffre et me reproche, aux minutes marquées par la lassitude, de ne pas faire nombre avec ceux qui ennuyés de tout afin de trouver le salut définitif, vont droit à l'édifice de ton Art, pour eux le terme du chemin. Il ouvre, cet incontestable portique, en des temps de jubilé qui ne le sont pour aucun peuple, une hospitalité contre l'insuffisance de soi et la médiocrité des patries ; il exalte des fervents jusqu'à la certitude : pour eux ce n'est pas

¹⁶¹ "[...] déjà, de quel bonds que parte sa pensée, elle ressent la colossale approche d'une Initiation » (Mallarmé, "Rêverie," OCM2 154). See also Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta*, 128-129.

¹⁶² From the entrance for "Barbarous" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "[from] Greek *βάρβαρος* [...] The Greek word had probably a primary reference to speech, and is compared with Latin *balbus* stammering." See Chapter 3.

l'étape la plus grande jamais ordonnée par un signe humain, qu'ils parcourent avec toi comme conducteur, mais le voyage fini de l'humanité vers un Idéal. Au moins, voulant ma part du délice, me permettras-tu de goûter, dans ton Temple, à mi-côte de la montagne sainte, dont le lever de vérités, le plus compréhensif encore, trompette la coupole et invite, à perte de vue du parvis, les gazons que le pas de tes élus foule, un repos : c'est comme l'isolement, pour l'esprit, de notre incohérence qui le pourchasse, autant qu'un abri contre la trop lucide hantise de cette cime menaçante d'absolu : devinée dans le départ des nuées là-haut, fulgurante, nue, seule : au-delà et que personne ne semble devoir atteindre. Personne! (OCM2 158-159).

Here Mallarmé does not criticize Wagner solely in terms of the *absolute* nature of his total work of art; indeed, Mallarmé himself was perpetually concerned with questions of the absolute and the dissolute (cf. *Notes en vue du «Livre»*, in OCM1 ¹⁶³). To be more precise, then, the distinction that Mallarmé asserts between himself and Wagner is one of access or finality, of the “certitude” or the “salut définitif” that Wagner seems to offer and that Mallarmé will have always refused. For Mallarmé—who nevertheless greatly enjoyed Wagner’s music (a fact that one should continuously recall here to avoid setting up any reassuring Manichaeism between the two figures)—Wagner’s music offers only a restful stop very high up on a mountain that is ultimately unscalable.

Or, in other words, as Mallarmé puts it earlier in the essay, in an extremely dense sentence cast in aquatic rather than geologic metaphor, for Wagner:

Tout se retrempe au ruisseau primitif : pas jusqu'à la source (OCM2 157).

¹⁶³ But the difference between the Mallarméan and Wagnerian absolute might be already articulated in the potential titles that Mallarmé originally considered for his *Livre*: “La gloire du Mensonge ou le Glorieux Mensonge” (OCM1 1372).

From the mountain to the stream (both rather Romantic figures), the critique is the same: Wagner does not arrive at the pure expressivity that he seems to offer, and that his followers (i.e. Mallarmé's friends and compatriots) so fervently took as the measure of his art. Although this Heraclitian image of the stream is a rather generalized one, here it is hard not to hear the refrain of a peculiarly Rousseauian *ruisseau* running through it—that of the primitive watering holes around which, in the *Essai*, a purely expressive, accented, musical language bursts forth from sexual desire. One enters this stream, moreover, through the word *retrempe*, itself overdetermined by several potential meanings. The word's most obvious sense signifies a sort of Romantic baptism, a submersion in the purifying and invigorating waters of Wagner's music. But *tremper* can also indicate the tempering of steel—as in *acier trempé*—which suggests that these primitive waters would also be used to *forge* feeling in into more strengthened and identifiable forms, such as in Wagner's leitmotivic forging of swords and spears and rings. And then, *retremper* could yet suggest another kind of tempering, found in a root shared with the word *tempérer* (which according to the 1874 second edition of the *Littre* can relate to *tremper* by way of the provençal *tempar* and *trempar* and their derivation from the latin *temperare*¹⁶⁴), in order to refer to both affective temperance and to the historical tempering of musical intervals. But, for Mallarmé, such an affective-musical bath will always remain insufficient: it will go “pas jusqu'à la source.” *Pas* here can of course mean both “step” and “not” (an ambivalence that Derrida also plays upon in his own writing to great effect). This oxymoronic quality indicates a double movement according to which the content of Wagner's expression would perpetually recede in the same proportion as one approaches it: every step toward a pure form of expression would be also its negation.

¹⁶⁴ *Dictionnaire de la langue française, par É. Littré de l'Académie française*, v. 4, “Q-Z.” Librairie Hachette Et Cie., Paris, 79, Boulevard Saint-Germain, 1874, pp. 2334 (“Tremper”) and 2168 (“Tempérer”).

This, then, very briefly, is Mallarmé's critique of Wagner as he suggests it in his "Rêverie." But to better understand the position from which such a critique is made, it will be necessary now to think through more precisely how this "pas jusqu'à la source" manifests in Mallarmé's own writing—especially with regard to the ways in which he, like Wagner, appears to bring the other arts together within it. Can Mallarmé avoid building his own temple and settling down on "la montagne sainte"?

— Re-mark 3: Effects on the Nerves

Les ondes sonores du système nerveux ont de ces vibrations mystérieuses. Elles assourdissent, pour ainsi dire, par la diversité de leurs échos, l'analyse du coup initial qui les a produites. La mémoire distingue le milieu ambiant de la chose, et la chose elle-même se noie dans cette sensation générale, jusqu'à demeurer opiniâtrement indiscernable.
 Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "Le Convive des dernières fêtes"

In *Oper und Drama*, Wagner lambastes the wildly successful "grand operas" of Giacomo Meyerbeer in the following manner:

Das Geheimnis der Meyerbeerschen Opernmusik ist—*der Effekt*. Wollen wir uns erklären, was wir unter diesem

»Effekte« zu verstehen haben, so ist es wichtig, zu beachten, daß wir uns gemeinhin das näherliegenden Wortes »Wirkung« hierbei nicht bedienen. Unser natürliches Gefühl stellt sich den Begriff »Wirkung« immer nur im Zusammenhange mit der vorhergehenden *Ursache* vor: wo wir nun, wie im vorliegenden Falle, unwillkürlich zweifelhaft darüber sind, ob ein solcher Zusammenhang bestehe, oder wenn wir sogar darüber belehrt sind, daß ein solcher Zusammenhang gar nicht vorhanden sei, so sehen wir in der Verlegenheit uns nach einem Worte um, das den Eindruck, den wir z. B. von Meyerbeerschen Musikstücken erhalten zu haben vermeinen, doch irgendwie bezeichne, und so wenden wir ein ausländisches, unserem natürlichen Gefühle nicht unmittelbar nahestehendes Wort, wie eben dieses »Effekt« an. Wollen wir daher genauer das bezeichnen, was wir

unter diesem Worte verstehen, so dürfen wir »Effekt« übersetzen durch »*Wirkung ohne Ursache*« (OD 98).¹⁶⁵

In short, Meyerbeer's operas produce *effects without causes*: his operas are grand, but such grandeur is the effect of a vapid sensationalism. Later, in *Der Fall Wagner*, Nietzsche will turn this same criticism back upon Wagner himself (though he uses *Wirkung* rather than *Effekt*): "Wagner rechnet nie als Musiker, von irgend einem Musker-Gewissen aus: er will die Wirkung, er will Nichts als die Wirkung. Und er kennt das, worauf er zu wirken hat!" (Nietzsche, *Fall* 31).¹⁶⁶ Of course, both Wagner's and Nietzsche's criticisms are rather hyperbolic, and neither Meyerbeer nor indeed Wagner himself is so superficial.

To these more pejorative uses of the idea of "effect," one can juxtapose one of Mallarmé's most famous statements on his poetics: "*Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit*" (OCM1 663). This sentence, taken from an 1864 letter to his friend and fellow poet Henri Cazalis, was written quite early in Mallarmé's career—specifically with reference to *Hérodiade*, a poem that he had just begun but which he would never finish. At the time of the letter to Cazalis, Mallarmé in fact had plans to write *Hérodiade* as a tragedy, which he had hoped, at the suggestion of Banville, to stage at the Théâtre-Français (OCM1 678; Lenson 573). Here is the immediate context from which this statement is often detached:

¹⁶⁵ "The secret of Meyerbeer's operatic music is—*Effect*. If we wish to gain a notion of what we are to understand by this 'Effect' ('*Effekt*'), it is important to observe that in this connection we do not as a rule employ the more homely word '*Wirkung*' [lit. 'a working' [sic]]. Our natural feeling can only conceive of '*Wirkung*' as bound up with an antecedent *cause*: but here, where we are instinctively in doubt as to whether such a correlation subsists, or are even as good as told that it does not subsist at all, we look perplexedly around us for a word to anyhow denote the impression which we think we have received from, e.g., the music-pieces of Meyerbeer; and so we fall upon a foreign word, not directly appealing to our natural feeling, such as just this word 'Effect.' If, then, we wish to define what we understand by this word, we may translate 'Effect' by 'a Working, without a cause' ('*Wirkung ohne Ursache*')" (*Opera and Drama* 95).

¹⁶⁶ "Wagner never calculates as a musician with a musician's conscience, all he strains after is effect, nothing more than effect. And he knows what he has to make an effect upon!" (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 25).

J'ai enfin commencé mon *Hérodias*. Avec terreur, car j'invente une langue qui doit nécessairement jaillir d'une poétique très nouvelle, que je pourrais définir en ces deux mots: *Peindre, non la chose, mais l'effet qu'elle produit.* / Le vers ne doit donc pas, là, se composer de mots, mais d'intentions, et toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation (OCM1 663.).

Mallarmé deliberately avoids any attempt to represent (*peindre*) "la chose," opting instead to produce poetic *effects*, like Wagner's Meyerbeer or Nietzsche's Wagner; but these effects would be calculated precisely in order to prevent or interrupt the (re)presentation through language of "la chose," of a content that would cause them—that, whether felt or understood, would bring the movement of his poetry to rest, to "le terme du chemin," as he puts it in the "Rêverie" (OCM2 158; cited above). In this sense, Mallarmé indicates that his poetics will be guided not first by signification, but by the production of poetic effects in relation to "sensation:" "toutes les paroles s'effacer devant la sensation." Such sensation, however, is probably better understood through Hanslick than through Wagner, as *Empfindung* rather than *Gefühl*, inasmuch as the latter presupposes a kind of subjective recognition that, as we will see, Mallarmé tries to avoid.

Perhaps this analogy, between Mallarmé's poetic effects and the aesthetic effects of music, would be something of an overinterpretation, were it not an analogy frequently made by Mallarmé himself. This tendency begins early in Mallarmé's career with *Hérodias*, and lasts all the way through "La Musique et les Lettres" and even "Un Coup de dés."¹⁶⁷ In "La Musique et les Lettres," for instance, he makes bold statements like "[l]a Musique et les Lettres sont la face alternative ici élargie vers l'obscur [...] d'un phénomène" (OCM2 69); or, similarly: "[o]ublions la vieille distinction, entre la Musique et les Lettres, n'étant que le partage, voulu, pour sa

¹⁶⁷ For instance, see Calvin Brown, "The Musical Analogies in Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de dés,'" in *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2, *The Symbolist Movement*. 1967.

rencontre ultérieure, du cas premier” (ibid.). Elsewhere, in a letter to Edmund Gosse, he more simply writes: “je fais de la musique” (OCM1 807).¹⁶⁸ Valéry echoes these sentiments in a famous description of his symbolist approach to poetry in general:

[...] nos têtes littéraires ne rêvaient que de tirer du langage presque les mêmes effets que les causes purement sonores produisaient sur nos êtres nerveux (Valéry, “Avant-propos” xiii; emphasis added).¹⁶⁹

Mallarmé’s poetic uses of language, in other words, would—in embracing precisely that which Wagner had been accused of—produce *vague* effects on the *nerves*.¹⁷⁰ The precise status of such

¹⁶⁸ See also Mallarmé’s letters to Cazalis: “Un pauvre poète, qui n’est que *poète*—c’est-à-dire un instrument qui résonne sous les doigts des diverses sensations—est muet, quand il vit dans un milieu où rien ne l’émeut, puis ses cordes se distendent, et viennent la poussière et l’oubli” (OCM1 675; emphasis added); “J’ai, du reste, là, trouvé une façon intime et singulière de peindre et de noter les impressions très fugitives. Ajoute, pour plus de terreur, que toutes ces *impressions* se suivent comme dans une symphonie” (OCM1 666).

¹⁶⁹ Valéry: “Ce qui fut baptisé : le *Symbolisme* se résume très simplement dans l’intention commune à plusieurs familles de poètes (d’ailleurs ennemies entre elles), de « reprendre à la Musique leur bien. » [...] —Mais nous étions nourris de musique, et nos têtes littéraires ne rêvaient que de tirer du langage presque les mêmes effets que les causes purement sonores produisaient sur nos êtres nerveux. Les uns, Wagner ; les autres chérissaient Schumann. Je pourrais écrire qu’ils les haïssaient. A la température de l’intérêt passionné, ces deux états sont indiscernables. (“Avant-propos” to Lucien Fabre’s *Connaissances de la déesse*, xii-xiii). As L.J. Austin (not J.L. Austin) notes in his important essay, “Mallarmé on Music and Letters” (21), the project of “reprendre à la Musique leur bien” is a phrase attributable not to Valéry but to Mallarmé.

¹⁷⁰ Mallarmé himself uses the figure of the nerves in several places. For example, consider the following statement by Mallarmé, from yet another early letter to Cazalis (writing of a sonnet then titled “Vere Novo”): “C’est un genre assez nouveau que cette poésie, où *les effets matériels, du sang, des nerfs sont analysés et mêlés aux effets moraux, de l’esprit, de l’âme*” (OCM1 639; emphasis added). Even more interestingly, in an 1867 letter to Eugène Lefébure, Mallarmé similarly uses a series of musical metaphors to discuss his poetic and artistic ideas as related to and even derived from affective or nervous experience: “[...] il faut penser de tout son corps—ce qui donne une pensée pleine et à l’unisson comme ces cordes du violon vibrant immédiatement avec sa boîte de bois creux. Les pensées partant du seul cerveau (dont j’ai tant abusé l’été dernier et une partie de cet hiver) me font maintenant l’effet d’airs joués sur la partie aiguë de la chanterelle dont le son ne reconforte pas dans la boîte—qui passent et s’en vont sans se *créer*, sans laisser de trace d’elles. En effet, je ne me rappelle plus aucune de ces *idées* subites de l’an dernier. —Me sentant un extrême mal au cerveau le jour de Pâques, à force de travailler du seul cerveau (excité par le café, car il ne peut commencer, et, quant à mes nerfs, ils étaient trop fatigués sans doute pour recevoir une impression du dehors)—j’essayai de ne plus penser de la tête, et, par un effort désespéré, je roidis tous mes nerfs (du pectus) de façon à produire une vibration (en gardant la pensée à laquelle je travaillais alors qui devint le sujet de cette vibration, ou une impression)—, et j’ébauchai tout un poème longtemps rêvé [*Hérodade*], de cette façon. Depuis, je me suis dit, aux heures de synthèse nécessaire, « je vais travailler du cœur » et je sens mon cœur (sans doute que toute ma vie s’y porte) ; et, le reste de mon corps oublié, sauf la main qui écrit et ce cœur qui vit, mon ébauche se fait—se fait. Je suis véritablement décomposé, et dire qu’il faut cela pour avoir une vue très une de l’Univers!” (OCM1 720-271). See also Lees (*passim*), who thematizes the idea of the Mallarméan *effet* throughout his text *Mallarmé and Wagner*, though he does not very explicitly focus on the term.

vagueness—which in Mallarmé is not the same as a simple lack of clarity—can be illuminated somewhat by now turning to Derrida’s discussions of the poet from the late 1960s, in which he traces out how Mallarmé disseminated these effects in his writing.

5. *L’Écriture et le théâtre*

If Mallarmé often analogizes the poetic effects of his writing with performing arts like music (but also ballet and pantomime, for instance), he presumably does not do so in order to include them within a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*; however, these references to other forms of art are never simply ekphrastic either. Rather, as Derrida writes in “La double séance,” the genres of art each relate to one another in Mallarmé’s writing through their mutual relation to an absence—or what Baudelaire called a *lacune* (OCB2 782)—at the center of expression: “[l]es genres, sans fusionner dans un art total (méfiance discrète, ironique mais insurmontable de Mallarmé pour Wagner), ne s’échangent pas moins selon la circulation infinie de la métaphore scripturale, congénères pour ce qu’ils ne montrent quoi que ce soit et se *conjoignent* autour d’un foyer absent” (D 298).¹⁷¹ The following sections will more precisely demonstrate what Derrida might mean by this claim, and in doing so it will explore how a certain post-Wagnerian *dif-fusion* of the arts operates within Mallarmé’s writing.

“La double séance,” the essay from which the above passage was drawn, is Derrida’s most well-known piece of writing on Mallarmé, published in 1972 alongside “La pharmacie de Platon” and other essays in *Dissemination*. Before that, this two-part essay had already appeared

¹⁷¹ As discussed in Section 2, this relation is also to a degree present in Wagner, for whom each of the arts would supplement the others at the limits of the various senses, and thereby join with one another in a single *Gesamtkunstwerk*: “Die Grenzen der einzelnen Sinne sind aber auch ihre gegenseitigen Berührungspunkte” (KZ 38; cited above). Mallarmé, however, attempts to radicalize these same “insufficiencies” of the arts such that they can only join in relation to their *inability* to fully fuse into a unity, each art thus functioning as a figure for the displacement and incompleteness in his writing.

in issues 41 and 42 of *Tel Quel* (1971), after Derrida delivered it to the Groupe d'Études Théoriques earlier in 1969 (Miller 139). However, Derrida had already started to formulate this reading of Mallarmé in a currently unpublished lecture course that he had begun in 1968, under the title of *L'Écriture et le théâtre: Mallarmé/Artaud*.¹⁷²

Throughout the first six of this earlier seminar's nine total sessions (the final three of which address the writing of Antonin Artaud), Derrida developed some of the more prominent motifs that recur in his reading of Mallarmé in "La double séance." These include his understanding of the Mallarméan figure of the *hymen*,¹⁷³ as well as his engagement with Jean-Pierre Richard's thematic criticism (especially through the words "blanc" and "pli"). In addition to Richard's formidable *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, the seminar's "syllabus" includes the full two-volume Pléiade edition of Mallarmé's *Oeuvres Complètes* (to which Derrida adds: "à la fin / indispensable"), multiple texts by Maurice Blanchot, Philippe Sollers's *Littérature et totalité*, Valéry's *Variétés*, and various commentaries on Mallarmé besides Richard's: Henri Mondor's *Vie de Mallarmé*, Jacques Scherer's *L'Expression littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé*, Charles Mauron's *Introduction à la psychanalyse de Mallarmé*, and still yet other texts by Robert Greer Cohn, Albert Thibaudet, Jean-Paul Weber, and Gabriel Bonoure.¹⁷⁴

Besides this seminar's helpful elucidations of "La double séance," perhaps the most interesting aspect of its treatment of Mallarmé is the manner in which Derrida reads him alongside a series

¹⁷² Additionally, parts of another contemporaneous seminar, entitled *Littérature et vérité: Le concept de la mimesis*, also prefigure what Derrida goes on to do in "La Double séance." With regard to Mallarmé specifically, its first session, entitled "Hymen," presents much of the reading of "Mimique" that Derrida will perform in "La Double séance" and that I will also explore in another section below. Much of the rest of this seminar is dedicated to a reading of Plato and Aristotle.

¹⁷³ Though, again, the discussion of the "hymen" in relation to "Mimique" occurs in the first section of *Littérature et vérité: Le concept de la mimesis*.

¹⁷⁴ Cohn's *Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés: an exegesis*, Thibaudet's *La Poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé*, Weber's *Genèse de l'œuvre poétique*, and Bonoure's *Marelles sur le parvis*. In addition, Derrida includes Scherer's edition of *Le « Livre » de Mallarmé* and *Faux-pas, L'Espace littéraire, La Part du feu*, and *Le Livre à venir* by Blanchot. There are also several texts by and on Artaud, which I will not list here.

of broader nineteenth-century aesthetic debates that, in part for this very reason, I have already been discussing in this chapter: in this regard, Derrida dedicates much of the first two sessions of the seminar to readings of Baudelaire, Wagner, and Nietzsche, only after which he finally turns to Mallarmé at the very end of Session 2. The seminar's sixth session, by contrast, is entirely devoted to a reading of the 1886 "Hommage."

The passage cited above, in which Derrida comments upon Mallarmé's *méfiance* of Wagner ("méfiance discrète, ironique mais insurmountable") in relation to the arts, is the only time that Wagner himself is mentioned in the published version of "La double séance"—though he appears a total of five additional times through mentions of Mallarmé's "Rêverie" (twice) and "Hommage" (three times). Perhaps the most telling remark that Derrida makes in relation to Wagner in "La double séance" is when he mentions "*Richard Wagner, Rêverie d'un Poète français, que nous tenons et commentons ici en sous-main*" (D 254). Such a remark, which is made in parentheses and which would otherwise be easy to gloss over, refers not only to the possibility of commenting upon Mallarmé's "Rêverie," but also to the fact that Derrida had already commented upon this article and its broader contexts in his 1968-69 seminar. In this sense, the discussions of the arts in "La double séance" (particularly dance and pantomime) can and probably should also be read in terms of a certain musico-dramatic history, which I have already begun to outline, from the jeers of the Jockey Club to the *Concerts Lamoureux*. Consulting Derrida's seminar here will further clarify the extent to which his own reading of Mallarmé is able to complicate this history in turn.

L'Écriture et le théâtre begins by broadly inquiring, in its first session, how one can think theater in relation to writing, given that "[l]e théâtre—au sens strict—s'est développé dans une

culture pratiquant l'écriture phonétique" (Derrida, ET 1.3¹⁷⁵). In this sense, Derrida's seminar pursues Mallarmé's and Artaud's seemingly contrary understandings of theater, as two ways in which writing might potentially exceed and interrupt its traditional role as a graphic representation of spoken language (in a script or libretto, for instance).¹⁷⁶ Of this relationship between writing and theater, Derrida writes, on the first page of the seminar, that "[c]eci ne peut se penser qu'historiquement" (ET 1.1). This is not quite to say that Derrida is interested in chronicling historical narratives, or moreover in using such narratives as explanatory principles; instead, as will become more and more evident, this remark implies that it will be impossible to separate the Mallarméan text that he will consider from the other historical texts, ideas, and practices that it ultimately refracts beyond the bounds of narrativization. This is what will lead Derrida, before addressing Mallarmé in earnest in his seminar, to offer a lengthy discussion of Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Wagner in its second session, titled "Le parricide—L'autre père: « le dieu Richard Wagner »." ¹⁷⁷

Derrida's reading of Baudelaire in this second session concentrates on two texts in particular: *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris* and "L'art philosophique." The latter essay, never published during Baudelaire's lifetime, criticizes the didactic philosophy of what Baudelaire calls "l'école allemande" in painting (Chevenard, Cornelius, Kaulbach, Rethel et al.

¹⁷⁵ Seminar citations, preceded by the abbreviation ET, will refer firstly to the session from which the quotation is drawn, and secondly to the specific page number of the session (since each session begins again at page 1). For example, this citation (ET 1.3) refers to the third page of the first session of the seminar.

¹⁷⁶ As in *Voix et phénomène*, *L'Écriture et la différence*, and *De la grammatologie*—all published just one year before this lecture began—Derrida here is concerned with finding ways to displace the Western hegemony of this "écriture phonétique," a conception of writing that depicts it as only "the (graphic) signifier of a (phonic) signifier" (Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* 42). At the risk of oversimplifying his position (as outlined for instance in *De la grammatologie*), one could say that Derrida wants to show how the "logic of supplementarity" upon which this conception of writing is predicated is always already at work in the ostensibly self-contained presences to which writing is supposed to refer only secondarily. In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that Derrida is never simply attempting to develop a "theory of writing." Rather, he is interested in how the secondary, supplemental character that has historically been associated with writing already inheres within and corrupts that which would presume to be immediate and pure of such supplementarity or prosthetics.

¹⁷⁷ "le dieu Richard Wagner" is taken from Mallarmé's "Hommage" to Wagner.

(OCB2 1378)). “L’art philosophique” is the pejorative name that Baudelaire gives to their approach (or any approach) to art, which views its primary goal as *edification*—as the illustration of a knowledge or a morality for its audience. In other words, as Derrida describes it, Baudelaire’s essay opposes the aesthetic attempt to “[assigner] à l’art une mission de signification, le mettre en rapport avec la production ou la transmission d’un sens signifié” (ET 2.1): philosophic art thus names an “art d’enseignement” (ibid.), an “art d’éducation” (ET 2.3)—or, more bluntly, “un art didactique destiné à l’enfance” (ibid.).

Derrida identifies two major figures that Baudelaire uses to describe the mechanisms through which philosophic art pursues this childish form of didacticism: “le livre” and “l’hiéroglyphe.” As Derrida views it, the figure of “le livre” is “toujours pour Baudelaire livre philosophique” (ET 2.2), and as such:

Le livre—qui est ainsi mis à l’écart de l’art, plastique ou littéraire—se caractérise ici par deux traits : 1. la totalité, le cycle, le cercle, ou la sphère (le volume) 2. la raison, le raisonnement plutôt, la démonstration, l’enseignement d’une vérité ou d’un sens qui sont déjà là et qui se ressemblent dans le volume (ET 2.3).¹⁷⁸

Probably the most important trait of this figure of the “philosophical” book, however, is the fact that it “est systématiquement et historiquement lié à la pratique de l’écriture phonétique-alphabétique” (Derrida, ET 2.4), and that it can therefore be ordered within a coherent and singular discourse, the meaning of which a philosophic art would simply *illustrate* or *transcribe*.

Derrida then describes how Baudelaire uses the figure of the *hieroglyph* to characterize the manner in which art would be made to illustrate the contents of the philosophical book in this kind of infantilizing way, as the

¹⁷⁸ Importantly, this philosophical idea of truth for Derrida also applies to history: “L’histoire et la vérité, ce serait la même chose : la parousie de la totalité du sens” (ET 2.2).

[...] rapport de l'adulte à l'enfant, nécessité où se croit l'artiste adulte non seulement de transmettre des 'idées' et des 'valeurs' à l'enfant mais de suppléer à l'incapacité intellectuelle de l'enfant, qui ne sait pas encore manier l'abstraction, en lui fournissant des illustrations, des images concrètes venant accompagner, commenter les thèmes d'enseignement. C'est précisément ce commentaire en images que Baudelaire désigne comme écriture hiéroglyphique (Derrida, ET 2.3-4).

For Baudelaire, art should never be reduced to a "hieroglyphic" illustration in this sense: "[c]e qu'il ne faut pas faire, c'est remplacer l'art, plastique *ou* littéraire, par le *livre d'images* (ibid.). As opposed to this vision of art as a "book of images," which would merely transcribe or remediate a "philosophical" meaning otherwise articulable in a phonetic-alphabetic discourse (as more or less its "moral"), Derrida proposes the following formula: for Baudelaire, "[l]'essentiel, c'est que l'art ne communique qu'avec l'art, jamais avec le contraire de l'art, à savoir le livre, qui est toujours pour Baudelaire livre philosophique" (ET 2.2).

In pursuing this relationship of art to art, and in eschewing art's relation to any "philosophical" Urtext, Derrida subsequently ends up complicating Baudelaire's pejorative use of the figure of the hieroglyph, arguing that hieroglyphic writing cannot be understood to be a simple "pictoriographie naïve" (ET 2.4)—not least because this view is patently false with respect to the actual complexities presented by the relationship of the system of hieroglyphic writing to spoken language (cf. Champollion¹⁷⁹). In preparing especially to address Mallarmé's own metaphorical understanding of hieroglyphics later in his seminar, then, Derrida writes:

¹⁷⁹ Already in the 1820s, French Egyptologist Jean-François Champollion had recognized that hieroglyphs were not simply symbolic illustrations of ideas or objects, as had previously been assumed by European academics; they also contained phonetic elements, and could thus be read according to what would later become known in linguistics as the rebus principle. For example, consider Alan H. Gardiner's describes the moment of Champollion's decipherment of the cartouche "Ramses:" "The truth dawned upon him only on the 14th September, when he received from a friend the engraving of certain inscriptions from the temple of Abu Simbel. In the last two signs of

Baudelaire n'en retient ici, en somme, que la fantasme domestique dont l'européen s'est longtemps contenté, y trouvant son intérêt, quant à cette écriture étrangère. Ce que Baudelaire exclut d'essentiel dans l'hiéroglyphe, dans cette écriture non phonétique, c'est que justement, en tant que non phonétique, dans la mesure de son non-phonétisme (car elle comporte aussi en elle des éléments d'écriture phonétique) elle ne s'ordonne pas au discours, elle ne transcrit pas un discours en images. Dans ce sens le hiéroglyphe n'est pas l'esclave d'une parole philosophique. En ce sens il n'y a pas de livres d'hiéroglyphe au sens strict. Le concept de livre est systématiquement et historiquement lié à la pratique d'écriture phonétique-alphabétique. Ce que Baudelaire ne retient pas, c'est la spatialité irréductible et multidimensionnelle du hiéroglyphe qui n'est pas une linéarité reproduisant le temps du discours, de la parole. Le hiéroglyphe est irréductiblement plastique et c'est ce que Baudelaire ne retient pas ici. Il le considère uniquement comme cet auxiliaire du discours pédagogique, auxiliaire de surcroît moins efficace que cet autre auxiliaire qu'est l'alphabet et que Baudelaire appelle ici *typographie* (ET 2.4; emphasis added).

The manner in which Baudelaire critiques didactic imagery as hieroglyphic, in other words, only addresses a particular (orientalist) figuration or metaphorization of the hieroglyph as symbolic illustration¹⁸⁰—which does not account for what Derrida sees as its quality as a system of

the cartouche he at once recognized the letter s of his alphabet. Before these stood a sign which he had reason for thinking was connected with the notion of "birth," "to be born," in Coptic *mas*. Before this, again, he noted the image of the sun "to be pronounced *Rē* or *Rā*," as Coptic also had taught him. *Ra-mas-ses*, he read, and in the same instant it was borne in upon him that the long-sought solution of the problem was found; for here, in the name of a famous Pharaoh whose memory was preserved in many ancient writers, he found a native word of indubitable antiquity written in part phonetically, like the names of the Ptolemies and Cleopatras which he had long since deciphered, and in part ideographically, as his researches had again and again assured him must be the case" (3).

¹⁸⁰ Of course, the hieroglyph has been figured in many different ways in Western European thought, from the German Romantics following the 1799 discovery of the Rosetta Stone, through to later writers like Nietzsche, Mallarmé, and Derrida himself in the twentieth century (in texts like *De la grammatologie*, "Le puits et la

writing, the spatial character of which would be irreducible to the simple representation of the voice or an interior monologue (even if, of course, it can still represent spoken language). This irreducibly spatial character of the hieroglyph will return in Mallarmé.

But if Baudelaire in this way minimizes the potential excesses of significance in the hieroglyph, he nevertheless offers other figures that would enable art to avoid recourse to the didactic transmission of “philosophic” meaning—namely *allégorie* or *correspondance*.¹⁸¹ And it is precisely in terms of this avoidance (of recourse to a “philosophical” Urtext) that Derrida will characterize Baudelaire’s embrace of Wagner, for which he lists the following reasons:

1. [Baudelaire] lui fait mérité d’avoir convoqué tous les arts sur la scène. (ET 2.7) [...]
2. Baudelaire trouve entre Wagner et lui-même une correspondance et une consonance qui n’est autre que, précisément, le motif de l’allégorie universelle, de la correspondance universelle entre les ordres de signifiants, entre les ordres de sensibilité (vision, audition, olfaction, etc.), c’est-à-dire finalement entre les différents arts qui peuvent chacun fonctionner comme le hiéroglyphe de l’autre (ibid.) [...]
3. Wagner enfin [...] a su pratiquer en somme une sorte d’écriture scénique, de graphie théâtrale (ET 2.8).¹⁸²

A major reason that Baudelaire is drawn to Wagner, then, would be the privilege that the latter affords to the correspondences of different forms of art with one another, without their mediation in a content fixed outside of them to which they would refer. Through this relationship or

pyramide,” and “La double séance,” as well as “Scribble (pouvoir/écrire),” which constitutes Derrida’s most sustained commentary on hieroglyphics as a system of writing, and which he wrote as a preface to a French translation of William Warburton’s eighteenth-century treatment of the hieroglyph).

¹⁸¹ In Session 2 of the seminar, Derrida discusses allegory and correspondence in Baudelaire through poems like “Le Masque.”

¹⁸² “[...] c’est-à-dire finalement entre les différents arts qui peuvent chacun fonctionner comme le hiéroglyphe de l’autre:” here Derrida already seems to be hinting that the non-phonetic spatiality of hieroglyphic can be read in Baudelaire as well.

correspondence of the arts in an “allégorie universelle,” Wagner eschews the hegemony of the book or “des vieilles routines du livret” (OCB2 790; qtd. in Derrida, ET 2.8). The arts—particularly theater, music, poetry, and dance—are thus brought into a more direct relation with one another, relativizing their reliance on the discursive content of a libretto. In this way, according to Derrida, Baudelaire sees Wagner as subverting the external and ultimately pedagogical referentiality that typifies philosophic art.

Over the subsequent pages of Session 2, Derrida cites several passages both by Baudelaire and by Wagner (as he is quoted by Baudelaire in the *Tannhäuser* essay),¹⁸³ through which Derrida more closely considers Wagner’s desire to find, in his fusion of music and poetry, the point at which “on exprimerait avec la clarté la plus satisfaisante ce que ne pouvait exprimer chacun d’eux [the arts] isolément” (Wagner, qtd. in OCB2 789; ET 2.9). Derrida thus goes on to identify an important passage from the *Lettre sur la musique*, which Baudelaire also cites, in which Wagner names *mythos* as the privileged narrative form through which he would accomplish this kind of inter-artistic expression, since myth would constitute, in Wagner’s view, a “forme concrète, exclusive de toute imitation” (Wagner, *Lettre sur la musique* xxvi; ET 2.10).¹⁸⁴ In other words, the subject matter of myth would, in its universality and lack of direct historical referent, supposedly circumvent the imitative or mimetic abstractions of traditional theater (that would rely still on an originary “philosophical” text) and act instead as allegorical

¹⁸³ Derrida also spends several pages discussing Nietzsche in relation to music, language, and the hieroglyph. There will not be space to explore his discussion of Nietzsche here, however.

¹⁸⁴ Wagner: “je me voyais nécessairement amené à désigner le mythe comme matière idéale du poète. Le mythe est le poème primitif et anonyme du peuple, et nous le retrouvons à toutes les époques repris, remanié sans cesse à nouveau par les grands poètes des périodes cultivées. Dans le mythe, en effet, les relations humaines dépouillent presque complètement leur forme conventionnelle et intelligible seulement à la raison abstraite ; elles montrent ce que la vie a de vraiment humain, d’éternellement compréhensible, et le montrent sous cette forme concrète, exclusive de toute imitation [...]” (Wagner, *Lettre* xxv-xxvi ; qtd. in OCB2 791-792; qtd. in Derrida ET 2.10).

vehicles (as Mallarmé puts it) into which Wagner could pour the immediate expressivity of his art. In Derrida's words, this dramatic mythos is typified by:

[...] le recours à l'histoire, mais à une histoire dont l'événement aura été purifié, simplifié, schématisé et de ce fait dépouillé de son accidentalité, devenu alors une sorte de paradigme, de structure légendaire et mythique. Et du fait qu'on rejoint ainsi par le théâtre le mythe comme structure universelle et universellement intelligible, on n'a plus à raconter un événement, à représenter un fait, à décrire un geste. On a affaire plutôt à un geste qui n'est plus alors la reproduction d'une histoire mais sa transfiguration essentielle. Dès lors qu'ainsi l'on n'a plus à reproduire l'événement historique, ni à représenter, raconter, décrire, etc. un fait réel, le drame cesse alors d'être *imitatif*. Et Wagner, cité par Baudelaire le dit expressément dans le texte que je vais encore lire [*Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*] et où je vous invite à souligner en somme cette antinomie du mythe et de l'imitation, de mythos et de la mimesis comme imitation. Le mythe n'imité [pas] (ET 2.9-10).

Myth thus provides Wagner with a supposedly timeless,¹⁸⁵ non-referential and non-mimetic content around which to focus the unity of his expression, outside of its dependence on any text that would precede it.

It will be precisely this mythic attempt to circumvent mimesis that Mallarmé will confront and complicate (though not strictly oppose) in what might be called his *Auseinandersetzung* with Wagner's work—though, of course, if Mallarmé confronts this aspect of Wagner, it will not be to reestablish any simply didactic art (a phenomenon to which

¹⁸⁵ See also Wagner, OD 188 (*Opera and Drama* 191).

Mallarmé was perhaps even more allergic than Baudelaire¹⁸⁶). Instead of attempting to get around the problems of mimetic reference, then, Mallarmé *multiplies* them in order to render any direct expression always already overdetermined by an excess of referentiality: this multiplication of mimesis is a major question that Derrida explores in “La double séance,” to which I will now turn. But given the seminar’s broader contexts—in Baudelaire and Wagner—which have been discussed above, it should now be all but unsurprising that the manner in which Derrida will articulate this Mallarméan mimesis will pass not only through a notion of poetic writing, but also and especially through several of the arts—as their *hymen*.

6. Pantomime(sis)

The imitative problems associated with representational and didactic (i.e. “philosophical”) art, as outlined variously by Wagner and Baudelaire and which Derrida discusses at length in the second session of his seminar, can be seen to provide some insight into Derrida’s inclination in “La double séance” to approach Mallarmé in terms of Plato and the Platonic understanding of

¹⁸⁶ In his very early text, *Hérésies artistiques : L’art pour tous*, Mallarmé writes: “Toute chose sacrée et qui veut demeurer sacrée s’enveloppe de mystère. Les religions se retranchent à l’abri d’arcanes dévoilés au seul prédestiné : l’art a les siens. La musique nous offre un exemple. Ouvrons à la légère Mozart, Beethoven ou Wagner, jetons sur la première page de leur oeuvre un oeil indifférent, nous sommes pris d’un religieux étonnement à la vue de ces processions macabres de signes sévères, chastes et inconnus. Et nous refermons le missel vierge d’aucune pensée profanatrice. / J’ai souvent demandé pourquoi ce caractère nécessaire a été refusé à un seul art, au plus grand [i.e. poetry]. [...] / Ainsi les premiers venus entrent de plain-pied dans un chef d’oeuvre, et depuis qu’il y a des poètes, il n’a pas été inventé, pour l’écartement de des importune, une langue immaculée, —des formules hiératiques dont l’étude aride aveugle le profane et aiguillonne le patient fatal ;—et ces intrus tiennent en façon de carte d’entrée une page de l’alphabet où ils ont appris à lire! / Ô fermoirs d’or des vieux missels! Ô hiéroglyphes inviolés des rouleaux de papyrus! / Qu’advient-il de cette absence de mystère?” (OCM2 360-361). Derrida cites parts of this passage toward the beginning of the third session of the seminar (ET 3.3). Incidentally, as Austin observes (“«Le principal pilier»” 159), this passage is also the first time that Wagner is mentioned in Mallarmé’s oeuvre—in 1862, one year after the *Tannhäuser* scandal. Here the young Mallarmé—according to what can be seen as, perhaps, a certain elitism, and according to what is now a common comparison of music with hieroglyphics—bemoans the fact that music requires the intense study of its idiomatic language before it can be read, whereas it is assumed that one can read poetry (at least in the technical sense) only with a basic literacy (cf. also Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶ 67). However, as Derrida argues, it would be both possible and necessary to show how this seeming elitism in Mallarmé’s early advocacy for the difficulty of poetry “n’avait rien de conservateur. Il faut et il est possible de concilier un certain hermétisme rigoureux, une difficulté implacable et un dessein politique qui ne concède rien aux valeurs bourgeoises de l’élite [...]” (ET 3.3).

mimesis (though they are not at all the only reasons¹⁸⁷). In this sense, then, the prefigurations of the discussions of imitation in “La double séance” that occur in *L’Écriture et le théâtre* seem to point toward the possibility that Derrida’s reading of Mallarmé and Plato can also be reflected, by way of the above discussions of Baudelaire and Wagner, back onto the nineteenth-century musico-dramatic contexts that largely disappear from “La double séance” in its published form. The beginning of such a rereading is what I will attempt here, in order to show how (Derrida’s interpretation of) Mallarmé’s writing undermines the Wagnerian attempt to circumvent the mimetic.

It is primarily in terms of Plato’s philosophy that Derrida offers a twofold description of the concept of *mimesis* in “La double séance.” As Bennington suggests (“Derrida’s Mallarmé” 48-49), this description is probably most clearly articulated toward the end of a long footnote near the beginning of the essay (footnote 8 in the French), where Derrida states, firstly, that “*La mimesis* produit le double de la chose” (D 230, fn. 8), and secondly, that “[r]esemblant ou non, l’imitant est quelque chose” (ibid.). In other words, *mimesis* doubles a thing, but the double that it produces (and that is supposed to resemble it) is also a second, different thing. From this distinction, the degree to which this second, doubled, thing—the “mimeme” (ibid.)—corresponds or can be made to correspond with the first, more original thing, will determine the degree to which a mimetic relation can be seen to be “good” or “bad,” “eikastic” or “phantastic” (ibid.):

Ce qui nous importe ici, c’est cette duplicité « interne » du *mimeisthai* que Platon veut couper en deux, pour trancher entre la bonne *mimesis* (celle qui reproduit fidèlement et dans la vérité mais se laisse déjà menacer par le simple fait en elle de la duplication) et la

¹⁸⁷ Consider especially the importance of the “Idea” for both Plato and Mallarmé—as well as, we will see, figures of light.

mauvaise, qu'il faut contenir comme la folie (296 *a*) et le (mauvais) jeu (396 *e*) (D 229-230, fn. 8).

Later in his text (D 236-238), Derrida observes how this potentially good/faithful or bad/unfaithful mimetic doubling can itself be redoubled in relation to two conceptions of truth: 1. on the level of *physis*, truth as the manner in which natural forms emanate (or "shine forth" (see below)) in relation to their ideal Being, which for Plato can be "recollected" through philosophical *anamnesis* or *aletheia*,¹⁸⁸ and 2. on the level of imitation proper, the truth "d'*homoiosis* ou d'*adaequatio* entre deux termes" (D 237-238), which is to say truth as correspondence on the level of the reproductive copy of nature (in writing, signs, or other representational logics like painting, etc.).

Derrida will argue that the operations of mimesis can never be so simply relegated to schematic divisions like these (good/bad, natural/artificial, etc.). And this is in part why he will turn from Plato to Mallarmé's writing (or what Derrida calls its "re-mark"¹⁸⁹), since the latter *exemplifies* how mimesis will always be "escaping [Plato's] terms,"¹⁹⁰ will be inadequate to itself, will realize "la folie" and "le (mauvais) jeu" as the very conditions of "good" mimetic reproduction (and not just within Mallarmé's poetry, but everywhere, even and especially in Plato). In developing this claim, Derrida in "La double séance" turns to "Mimique,"¹⁹¹ a very short text that Mallarmé wrote in response to his cousin Paul Margueritte's pantomime called *Pierrot assassin de sa femme*.

¹⁸⁸ See also D 234-235.

¹⁸⁹ For a good discussion of the "re-mark," see Bennington's "Derrida's Mallarmé" (especially pp. 50-51).

¹⁹⁰ "[...] part of Derrida's point is that this [Platonic] doctrine *cannot* in fact account for mimetic practices in general, so it is predictable that all subsequent doctrines of mimesis (and indeed Plato's own) will in some sense always be escaping its terms, and so Derrida's schematic footnote will to that extent come to have a slightly parodic ring, as he shows how Plato's discourse is *also* necessarily escaping the hold of this 'logical machine'" (Bennington, "Derrida's Mallarmé" 49).

¹⁹¹ Barbara Johnson even rather boldly translates "Mimique" as "Mimesis" in her English translation of *Divagations*.

The script for Margueritte's strange play describes the story of Pierrot (of the traditional harlequinade), who recounts, through mime, having tickled his wife to death, and who then proceeds to drink himself into a stupor. One might note several things about this play in passing—for instance, the correspondences between the senses that is suggested when Pierrot “drinks” his wine five times (*Pierrot* 21), or the strange instructions indicating that “La MVSQVE divague” or that “La MVSQVE s’arrete, écoute” (*Pierrot* 16). But a more central aspect of the play—which both Mallarmé and Derrida note, and note well—is the *nota bene* at its outset, indicating that, although the text is written in the form of a verbal monologue, it should not be spoken but only interpreted through mime: “N.B. — Pierrot semble parler? — Pure fiction littéraire! — Pierrot est *muet*, et ce drame, d’un bout à l’autre, *mimé*” (Margueritte, *Pierrot* 1).¹⁹² It is with this in mind, then, that Derrida writes:

Ce que Mallarmé a donc *lu* dans ce livret, c’est la prescription *s’effaçant d’elle-même*, l’ordre donné au Mime de n’imiter rien qui de quelque façon préexistât à son opération (D 243-244).

Or, similarly, a few pages earlier:

Il n’y a pas d’imitation. Le Mime n’imite rien. Et d’abord il n’imite pas. Il n’y a rien avant l’écriture de ses gestes. Rien ne lui est prescrit. Aucun présent n’aura précédé ni surveillé le tracement de son écriture. Ses mouvements forment une figure que ne prévient ni n’accompagne aucune parole. Ils ne sont liés au *logos* par aucun ordre de conséquence. « *Ainsi ce Pierrot Assassin de sa Femme composé et rédigé par lui-même, soliloque muet...* » (D 239-240).

In short, the mime’s relationship to the text is not imitative or transcriptive: the mime does not imitate, represent, or recreate the content of a written text, but interprets and necessarily changes

¹⁹² Derrida refers directly to this N.B. in D 246.

it in movement—in such a way that the text can no longer be understood to precede the mime's performance in any simple sense of logical or chronological priority. In this sense, "[l]e Mime n'est assujetti à l'autorité d'aucune livre" (D 240).¹⁹³ This is to say that the pantomime in *Pierrot* displaces the usual theatrical privilege of the text as preexisting archive of meaning or instruction (libretto, *livret*, script)—and, in fact, it is only in the *departure* from the text as written that it this pantomime can be enacted at all. Explicitly citing Margueritte's N.B., Derrida at one point calls this difference between the text-as-written and the text-as-performed a *décalage* (D 246): a gap, lag, or Baudelairean translational *lacune* that will become the subject of Mallarmé's own writing on Margueritte's text, in which he will himself mimic this role of the mime.¹⁹⁴

Although Mallarmé frequently visited the theater—and was even involved with a community theater at Valvins (now Vulaines-sur-Seine)—his "Mimique" was not written in direct response to any performance of *Pierrot*, but rather, as Derrida observes, in relation to a reading of the second edition of its text (D 245). Given the abovementioned disparity or *décalage* between the text and its performance, this detail becomes an even more important one: it means

¹⁹³ One might say that this "livre" in "La double séance" is to an extent remarked by the Baudelairean "livre" discussed above—or at least that the figure of the "livre" here is deployed in a similar manner. Of course, within the text of "La double séance," the "livre" more directly refers back to Plato (D 226-234), for instance in relation to the *Philebus* ("Je m'imagine que notre âme ressemble alors à un livre"), an excerpt from which opens the essay (alongside the full text of "Mimique"). A typewritten page containing this excerpt from the *Philebus* can also be found among the 1968-69 seminar materials housed at the IMEC archives in Caen, France.

¹⁹⁴ Here is the full text of "Mimique:" "Le silence, seul luxe après les rimes, un orchestre ne faisant avec son or, ses frôlements de pensée et de soir, qu'en détailler la signification à l'égale d'une ode tue et que c'est au poète, suscité par un défi, de traduire! le silence aux après-midi de musique ; je le trouve, avec contentement, aussi, devant la réapparition toujours inédite de Pierrot ou du poignant et élégant mime Paul Margueritte. / Ainsi ce PIERROT ASSASSIN DE SA FEMME composé et rédigé par lui-même, soliloque muet que, tout du long à son âme tient et du visage et des gestes le fantôme blanc comme une page pas encore écrite. Un tourbillon de raisons naïves ou neuves émane, qu'il plairait de saisir avec sûreté : l'esthétique du genre situé plus près de principes qu'aucun! rien en cette région du caprice ne contrariant l'instinct simplificateur direct. Voici — « La scène n'illustre que l'idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d'où procède le Rêve), vicieux mais sacré, entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir : ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé, *sous une apparence fausse de présent*. Tel opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans briser la glace : il installe, ainsi, un milieu, pur, de fiction. » Moins qu'un millier de lignes, le rôle, qui le lit, tout de suite comprend les règles comme placé devant un tréteau, leur dépositaire humble. Surprise, accompagnant l'artifice d'une notation de sentiments par phrases point proférées — que, dans le seul cas, peut-être, avec authenticité, entre les feuillets et le regard règne un silence encore, condition et délice de la lecture" (OCM2 178-179).

that when Mallarmé writes “Mimique”—parts and variations of which he had already drafted in 1886 and 1887 for *La Revue indépendante* (just after beginning to regularly listen to Wagner at the *Concerts Lamoureux*)—it is not as a piece of theatrical criticism, but as what one might be tempted to call a textual performance, according to which Mallarmé’s own text mimics the role of the mime in relation to Margueritte’s text, as the paradigm of a *reading*. Consider “Mimique’s” final line: “[s]urprise, accompagnant l’artifice d’une notation de sentiments par phrases point proférées—que, dans le seul cas, peut-être, avec authenticité, entre les feuillets et le regard règne un silence encore, condition et délice de la lecture” (OCM2 179).

This silence between the eye and the page, mimicking the *décalage* between the mime and Margueritte’s text, understood as the condition of reading, is also what Mallarmé will cite elsewhere as the condition of a poetic “music.” In this regard, he writes, for instance, in the 1893 letter to Gosse: “c’est la même chose que l’orchestre, sauf que littérairement ou silencieusement. [...] Employez *Musique* dans le sens grec, au fond signifiant Idée ou *rythme entre des rapports*” (OCM1 807; emphasis added). In “Mimique” as well, he will similarly describe a “silence aux après-midi de musique” (OCM2 178) that it is up to the poet to translate.¹⁹⁵ There is, in this sense, a kind of *silent music* at work in the “rythme entre des rapports” of Mallarmé’s “Mimique,” which is the “condition et délice” of its reading, just as much as there is a music that “s’arrete, écoute” in *Pierrot* itself (16).¹⁹⁶

And there is another rhythmic syncopation or *décalage* to be found in Margueritte’s text as well, in that the mime never actually commits the crimes that he mimes—neither on stage nor in the text. He only *remembers* or *repeats* them, miming not even an action, but a memory: “La scène n’illustre que l’idée, pas une action effective, dans un hymen (d’où procède le Rêve),

¹⁹⁵ Hence the subtitle of Roger Pearson’s *Mallarmé and Circumstance: The Translation of Silence*.

¹⁹⁶ It is easy to forget that music was an ever-present feature of pantomime, and in this sense at least, there would be a kind of music also ever-present but unnoticed playing beneath Derrida’s writing on “Mimique.”

vieux mais sacré, entre le désir et l'accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir: ici devançant, là remémorant, au futur, au passé, *sous une apparence fausse de présent*" (OCM2 178-179).¹⁹⁷ There is therefore also a temporal lag in the play—the text of which would only ever record another performance that will have always taken place before it. This twice-removed miming of a memory, in combination with the non-imitational instructions outlined in Margueritte's N.B. (among various intertextual factors that Derrida addresses: for instance, the history of the figure of Pierrot in Gautier's *Pierrot Postume* and Champfleury's *Pierrot Pendu* and *Pierrot valet de la mort*, or the trope of tickling to death, which Derrida claims goes back to Webster's 1612 *The White Devil* (D 252 fn. 16)), then leads Derrida to claim that

[l]e Mime *joue* dès lors qu'il ne se règle sur aucune action effective, et ne tend à aucune vraisemblance. Le jeu joue toujours la différence sans référence, ou plutôt sans référent, sans extériorité absolue, c'est-à-dire aussi bien sans dedans. Le Mime mime la référence. Ce n'est pas un imitateur, il mime l'imitation. L'Hymen s'interpose entre la mimique et la *mimesis* ou plutôt entre la *mimesis* et la *mimesis* (D 270).

The mime, in other words, would not take its directions from the text of Margueritte's *livret*, nor would its miming on stage imitate any action supposedly occurring in the present. Mallarmé's text then takes this non-presence of any referent for imitation as its very subject, positing it as the condition of all reading. The mime—and it is often difficult, if not misguided, to discriminate the imperceptible slippage through which Margueritte's mime becomes Mallarmé's mime, both miming without imitating the same "text"—thus writes itself in and as an act of "reference sans référent" (D 255), a non-imitative *imitatio*: "rédigeant et composant lui-même son soliloque, le traçant sur la page blanche qu'il est, le Mime ne se laisse dicter son texte depuis aucune autre lieu. Il ne représente rien, n'imité rien, n'a pas à se conformer à un référent antérieur dans un

¹⁹⁷ OCM2 178-179. Derrida also references this passage (D 260).

dessein d'adéquation ou de vraisemblance" (D 253). In these ways, then, the Derridean-Mallarméan mime simultaneously mimics the referential operations of mimesis, while perpetually deferring their completion as *homoiosis* or adequation.

If left at that, however, it might be tempting to read such Mallarméan miming as yet another attempt to subvert mimesis in favor of another form of pure and immediate expression, as the revelation of truth as *aletheia* in a glorified idea of writing:

On prévoit l'objection: puisqu'il n'imité rien, ne reproduit rien, puisqu'il entame en son origine cela même qu'il trace, présent ou produit, il est le mouvement même de la vérité. Non plus, certes, de la vérité d'adéquation entre la représentation et la présent de la chose même, ou entre l'imitant et l'imité, mais de la vérité comme dévoilement présent du présent: monstration, manifestation, production, *aletheia*. Le mime produit, c'est-à-dire fait paraître dans la présence, manifeste le sens même de ce que présentement il écrit : de ce qu'il *performe*. Il donne à percevoir la chose en personne, dans son visage. A suivre le fil de cette objection, on remonterait, par-delà l'imitation, vers un sens plus « originaire » de l'*aletheia* et du *mimesthai*. On aurait ainsi l'une des plus typique et des plus tentantes réappropriations métaphysiques de l'écriture, telle qu'elle pourra toujours avoir lieu dans les contextes les plus divers (D 254).

According to this hypothetical objection, Mallarmé's writing would constitute the immediate "production scripturale de la vérité" (ibid.), the communication or production of a truth imminent within its "performance:" writing would be reappropriated by the primal logic or mechanism of *physis*, as an originary emanation or revelation of truth (*aletheia*). Evidently, in Derrida's view, this is not the case: Mallarmé (even while subverting the completion of mimesis) takes his cue from pantomime and does not attempt to get around the "mimeme" (D 230, fn. 8), the decadent

artificiality of the mimetic supplement. He instead *maintains* the imitative and therefore derivative structure of mimesis while also perpetually deferring (or more precisely, referring) its accomplishment, fraying the ends of the mimetic thread so that his poetic reference does not terminate in any single referent. Bennington calls this a “*generalised mimesis*.”¹⁹⁸

With this in mind, then, here is the response that Derrida gives to the hypothetical “objection” according to which Mallarmé’s writing would unveil a truth:

Mais il n’en est rien. *Il y a* une mimique. Mallarmé y tient, comme au simulacre (à la pantomime, au théâtre et à la danse, tous ces motifs qui se croisent en particulier dans *Richard Wagner, Réverie d’un Poète français*, que nous tenons et commentons ici en sous-main). Nous sommes devant une mimique qui n’imite rien, devant, si l’on peut dire, un double qui ne redouble aucun simple, que rien ne prévient, rien qui ne soit en tous cas déjà un double. Aucune référence simple. C’est pourquoi l’opération du mime fait allusion, mais allusion à rien, allusion sans briser la glace, sans au-delà du miroir. « *Telle opère le Mime, dont le jeu se borne à une allusion perpétuelle sans brise la glace* » (D 254).

It is probably not a coincidence that this is the context—a hypothetical question of recollection and revelation—in which Derrida will bring up Mallarmé’s essay on Wagner for the first time in his double session (but not for the first time), here commenting upon its music silently, *en sous-main*.

¹⁹⁸ Bennington: “The point is that the Mime *mimes*, but mimes nothing, no-thing: this is what Derrida calls a ‘reference without referent’, whereby the apparent structure of *mimesis* is maintained, and indeed generalised, so that what we have is an imitation without a model, a ghost which is there from the start, the ghost of no once living (and now dead) thing. This *generalised mimesis*, obtained by the re-marking in the text of the referral of the text to another text (by the apparently reflexive re-marking, then, of the failure of the text to achieve closure and self-identity) is here presented as powerful enough to suspend the subordination of literature to truth [...]” (“Derrida’s Mallarmé 52).

7. Choreographies

To the extent that Derrida's discussions of Mallarmé's miming in "La double séance" can be thought in relation to (or in confrontation with) the Wagnerian subversion of imitation already explored in *L'Écriture et le théâtre*, this relation also cannot be thought outside of its associations with the question of *dance*. In *Oper und Drama*, Wagner himself associates dance and pantomime in their relation to music:

Daß dieses eigentümliche Sprachvermögen des Orchesters in der Oper bisher sich noch bei weitem nicht zu der Fülle hat entwickeln können, deren es fähig ist, findet seinen Grund eben darin, daß—wie ich dies an seinem Orte bereits erwähnte—bei dem Mangel aller wahrhaft dramatischen Grundlage der Oper das Gebärdenspiel für sie ganz unvermittelt noch aus der Tanzpantomime herübergezogen war. Diese *Ballettanzpantomime* konnte nur in ganz beschränkten, der möglichsten Verständlichkeit wegen endlich zu stereotypen Annahmen festgesetzten Bewegungen und Gebärden sich kundgeben, weil sie der Bedingungen gänzlich entbehrte, die ihre größere Mannigfaltigkeit als notwendig bestimmt und erklärt hätten (OD 313; emphasis added).¹⁹⁹

Part of what Wagner wants remedy in his music drama, therefore, is what he sees as opera's pale imitation of a previously organic relationship between music and movement, which has degraded into the mechanical gestures of a stilted and overly formalized "Ballettanzpantomime."²⁰⁰ A similar imitative relationship between music and dance in Wagner has already been discussed

¹⁹⁹ "That this idiomatic language of the Orchestra is a long way from having evolved in Opera to the fulness of which it is capable, is to be explained by the fact—already mentioned in its proper place—that, with its utter lack of a genuine dramatic basis, the Opera has always drawn its by-play directly from the pantomimic dance. These Ballet-mimetics had the very narrowest range of movement and gesture, and at last were stereotyped into settled make-believes, because they altogether lacked the necessary conditions that might have prescribed, and alike explained, a greater multiplicity" (*Opera and Drama* 320).

²⁰⁰ See also OD 79-80 (*Opera and Drama* 77-78).

above, but briefly recalling it in this context—especially in its relation with pantomime—will help to shed light not only on the manner in which Mallarmé deploys the figure of dance in his writing, but also on Derrida’s own pivot toward figures of dance later in “La double séance” and in his seminar.²⁰¹ In the third session of *L’Écriture et le théâtre* especially, once he begins to discuss Mallarmé, Derrida deliberately chooses to begin with the writing on dance, for which he gives three specific reasons:

Pourquoi commencer par la danse, par les textes sur la danse? Pour plusieurs sortes de raisons. / La première raison, c’est qu’il y a là un point de rupture avec Wagner. La seconde c’est que la danse est pour Mallarmé une écriture. La troisième c’est que cette danse comme écriture est le milieu de la littérature et du théâtre, le milieu au sens d’élément et le milieu au sens de moyen terme, de médiation entre écriture littéraire et théâtre (ET 3.5).

As evidence of dance being a “point de rupture avec Wagner,” Derrida cites Mallarmé’s comment, found in an 1886/7 letter to the Italian art critic Vittorio Pica, that

²⁰¹ Mallarmé was of course genuinely interested in dance, and Wagner’s thought should in no way be understood as a key to understanding Mallarmé’s writing on dance. Yet Mallarmé would have been aware of Wagner’s views on the matter: although there is no evidence he had read *Oper und Drama*, he did nevertheless read the *Lettre sur la musique* (as well as Baudelaire’s commentary on it), for instance, in which Wagner writes the following: “Nous ne connaissons la musique, chez les Grecs, qu’associée à la danse. Le mouvement de la danse assujettissait la musique et le poème que le chanteur récitait comme motif de danse aux lois du rythme : ces lois réglaient d’une manière si complète le vers et la mélodie, que la musique grecque (et ce mot impliquait presque toujours la poésie) ne peut être considérée que comme la danse exprimée par des sons et des paroles. Ce furent des motifs de danse, lesquels constituent le corps de toute la musique antique, qui, attachés originairement au culte païen, et perpétués dans le peuple, furent conservés par les premières communautés chrétiennes, et appliqués par elles aux cérémonies du culte nouveau à mesure qu’il se formait. La gravité de ce culte, qui proscrivait absolument la danse comme chose profane et impie, dut faire disparaître ce que la mélodie antique avait pour caractère essentiel, la vivacité et la variété extrême du rythme ; et l’on vit s’y substituer dans la mélodie le rythme dépourvu de toute espèce d’accent, qui caractérise le choral encore usité de nos jours dans les églises. En perdant la mobilité rythmique, cette mélodie perdait aussi son motif particulier d’expression ; dès qu’on lui enlevait cet ornement du rythme, on la dépouillait presque de toute puissance expressive, comme il est aisé de s’en convaincre pour peu qu’on l’imagine destituée encore de l’harmonie qui s’y trouve jointe aujourd’hui” (Wagner, *Lettre* xxvii-xxviii).

Wagner a proscrit cette écriture merveilleuse et immédiatement significative de la danse, s'en tenant plus ou moins à quelque juxtaposition de Beethoven et de Shakespeare (*Correspondance*, v. 3, 83).²⁰²

There are at least three parts this sentence worth noting here, each of which (although he does not say as much) more or less to correspond with the three reasons that Derrida gives for turning to dance: 1. “juxtaposition,” 2. “écriture merveilleuse,” and 3. “immédiatement significative.”

1. *Juxtaposition*. The idea that Wagner merely *juxtaposes* music with language, Beethoven with Shakespeare, is—given what has already been said above about Wagner’s aesthetic goals of organicism—not a mild criticism. As Derrida describes it: “[l]e reproche est assez dur” (ET 3.6). I will not dwell on this point here, since the relation between the arts in Mallarmé and Wagner will continue to be the major topic of this chapter in general.

2. *Écriture merveilleuse*. For Mallarmé, dance is *merveilleuse* or “féerique” (ibid.) because “elle est seule capable de faire couler en quelque sorte la musique dans le texte dramatique, d’éviter la juxtaposition” (ibid.). And it is a form of writing for the following reason:

Or la danse a l’air à la fois de signifier la musique, de signifier le texte verbal, de faire que la musique signifie le texte verbal et réciproquement. Et elle trace tout cela dans l’espace. C’est une écriture parce qu’elle déroule des significations dans l’espace.

Comme toute écriture, elle espace, elle spatialise ce qui autrement resterait purement temporel, comme la parole (texte verbal) ou comme la musique. Wagner a cru qu’il ferait du drame ou du théâtre en juxtaposant en somme deux temporalités (la parole shakespearienne et la musique de Beethoven). Or ces deux temps restent hétérogènes l’un à l’autre, et n’ouvrent aucune scène. Il n’y a pas de scène sans écriture et pas d’écriture

²⁰² This makes something of a straw man of Wagner, who views dance as necessary to drama; it is not the case, therefore, that Wagner proscribes dance, but rather that he attempts to infuse movement so intimately with his works that dance as such would generally disappear.

sans scène, c'est-à-dire sans espace, espacement. La danse comme écriture, Mallarmé la dénomme souvent telle (ibid.).

Mallarmé thus figures dance as a form of writing because of its relation to space. Derrida cites two examples of this tendency in Mallarmé, the first of which describes dance as an “écriture corporelle” and a “poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe” (OCM2 171); the second describes dance (before it is transformed by theater into ballet) as “si l’on veut, *hiéroglyphe*” (OCM2 178; emphasis added). Dance is a corporal and hieroglyphic writing, which is to say a form of writing irreducible to the graphic representation of spoken language (see above).²⁰³

3. *Immédiatement significative*. To describe dance as *immédiatement significative* is not to say that it would simply bypass signification in favor of immediate expression. In this context, it is instead to say that dance spatially embodies the referential movement that also produces the effects of signification in the first place. In this sense, to the extent that dance is immediate, it would signify nothing, in that what it immediatizes is *mediation itself*:²⁰⁴ it is the art of the

²⁰³ In “La double séance,” Derrida further describes *both* dance and pantomime in Mallarmé as hieroglyphic: “on sait avec quelle insistance Mallarmé décrit comme inscription hiéroglyphique le geste réglé de la danse ou de la pantomime” (D 240). For Mallarmé, the hieroglyph is a figure for what is hieratic (sacred, set apart) in writing, and Derrida notes this association in his seminar when he compares Mallarmé’s understanding of the hieroglyph with Baudelaire’s: “La littérature doit être *hieratique*, c’est-à-dire sacrée. Et le mot d’hiéroglyphe, chaque fois qu’il intervient chez Mallarmé importe d’abord cette dénotation hiératique, sacrée, inviolable. Hiéroglyphe veut dire inscription sacrée. [...] Mallarmé met en quelque sorte en opposition l’*hiéroglyphique* d’un côté (écriture sacrée, fermée, etc.) et la *didactique* (geste opposé à celui de Baudelaire qui entendait l’hiéroglyphe plutôt comme imagerie pédagogique)” (ET 3.3). Here Derrida references an earlier use of the hieroglyph by Mallarmé in *L’art pour tous* (cited above), in which he decries what he sees as the loss of mystery in the popularization of art: “Ô fermoirs d’or des vieux missels! Ô hiéroglyphes inviolés des rouleaux de papyrus! / Qu’advient-il de cette absence de mystère?” (OCM2 361).

²⁰⁴ On dance: “C’est une sorte de chiffre qui se donne pour être déchiffré mais qui finalement n’est qu’un chiffre s’effaçant pour laisser place à un autre chiffre. De ce point de vue, l’écriture comme danse est peut-être plus pure que l’écriture théâtrale et que l’écriture littéraire. Si l’on tient que le silence—la non-présence sous la forme de la voix, présence à soi—et l’espacement sont les traits essentiels de l’écriture, la danse est à cet égard plus pure que le théâtre parce qu’elle suspend la voix ; et elle est plus pure que la littérature pour la même raison et ainsi parce qu’elle est plus spatiale que la littérature, plus scénique. Naturellement la simple “pureté” ne suffit pas ici à faire préférer la danse. La pureté appauvrit peut-être ici les possibilités de jeu qui se multiplie dans le théâtre et dans la littérature dès lors qu’on peut considérer que la parole est aussi une écriture, dès lors qu’on déplace sa fonction de présentation ou de représentation de la présence (/.../). Donc la danse ne montre rien, n’imite rien, ne raconte rien qu’elle-même, mais elle-même non pas en tant qu’événement présent, comme la chose même, elle-même, plutôt

between (between, especially, writing and theater). In this regard, Derrida will discuss dance as writing and as a “hymen:”

[...] cette écriture sans appareil graphique—écriture verbale, non phonétique—cette danse comme poème se tient entre le théâtre et l’écriture littéraire, c’est-à-dire à la fois littérature et théâtre. À la fois littérature et théâtre, entre littérature et théâtre. C’est encore la valeur d’hymen qui s’impose: hymen comme paroi séparatrice, comme voile de virginité et hymen comme paroi de contact et milieu de confusion. Cet hymen—qui est aussi un écran réfléchissant—ne passe pas seulement entre le théâtre et l’écriture. Ou du moins s’il passe, par la danse, entre le théâtre et la littérature, c’est qu’il passe, au milieu de la danse comme il passe au milieu de la littérature et du théâtre, telle que les pense Mallarmé. / Passer au milieu de la littérature, du théâtre ou de la danse, pour un hymen, c’est, comme nous l’avons reconnu dans la Mimique, séparer l’écriture à la fois de l’auteur et du référent. Dans tout écriture, une sorte d’opération [...] se produit par laquelle nécessairement l’origine de l’écriture disparaît—singulièrement l’auteur et le nom d’auteur—et du même coup sa fin—singulièrement l’objet à montrer, à représenter, à l’imiter. *Effet sans cause, effet comme disparition de sa cause*. Toute écriture est le phénomène d’une disparition de la référence à la présence d’un auteur ou d’une chose ; ou plus précisément disparition non de la référence mais du référent. C’est pourquoi la référence sans référent est *allusion perpétuelle* devant une glace comme disait la Mimique (ET 3.7; emphasis added).

comme allusion allégorique à autre chose que soi qui pourtant n’est rien et que Mallarmé nomme aussi bien Idée. Ce qu’elle montre, c’est une monstration qui ne montre rien, ce qu’elle représente, c’est la représentation elle-même qui ne nous intéresse qu’à l’exclusion du représenté. Or que cette structure de la danse soit aux yeux de Mallarmé aussi celle du théâtre et de la littérature” (Derrida, ET 3.7-8). Derrida reiterates some of this language, here used to describe dance, in “La double séance,” but in reference to mimicry and Mallarmé’s understanding of the “Idea” (see D 257).

Here, then, dance is a form (even a “plus pure” form) of spatialized writing “sans appareil graphique.” As such, it exemplifies the movement of the disappearance, inherent in all writing, of its referent.²⁰⁵ In this sense, then, Derrida describes dance qua writing as an “[e]ffet sans cause, effet comme disparition de sa cause” (cf. Wagner’s Meyerbeer and Nietzsche’s Wagner above).

But this *effet sans cause* of writing, taken as a perpetual syncope between reference and referent, *also* returns us to Mallarmé’s musical “*rythme entre des rapports*” (OCM1 807), or Valéry’s decription of “tir[ant] du langage presque les mêmes *effets* que les causes purement sonores produisaient sur nos êtres nerveux” (Valéry, “Avant-propos” xiii ; emphasis added). In this manner, the performing arts of music, pantomime, and dance can be seen to relate to one another in Mallarmé’s writing not for the sake of any positive expression, but for the sake of mutually reproducing effects of disappearance, of the *décalages* or lacunae inherent in writing. With this in mind, one might reread Derrida’s remark in “La double séance,” that, for Mallarmé,

²⁰⁵ Derrida will spend several pages in “La double séance” (D 240-244) tracing out how figures of dance bleed into Mallarmé’s writing (which itself often borrows terminology from ballet). In this regard, he cites the following passage from Mallarmé (which also appears in the seminar): “« ...dans la flottaison de rêverie? L’opération ou poésie, par excellence et le théâtre. Immédiatement le ballet résulte allégorique : il enlacera autant qu’animerà, pour en marquer chaque rythme, toutes corrélations ou Musique, d’abord latentes, entre ses attitudes et maint caractère, tellement que la représentation figurative des accessoires terrestres par la Danse contient une expérience relative à leur degré esthétique, un sacre s’y effectue en tant que la preuve de nos trésors. A déduire le point philosophique auquel est situé l’impersonnalité de la danseuse, entre sa féminine apparence et un objet mimé, pour quel hymen : elle le pique d’une sûre pointe, le pose ; puis déroule notre conviction en le chiffre de pirouettes prolongé vers un autre motif... »” (qtd. In D293 and ET 3.8; OCM2 163). Referencing this passage, Derrida then describes dance as a form of hieroglyphic writing, and as a *hymen*: “Tout ce paragraphe est développé comme un tissu, ample voile, vaste et souple étoffe qu’on déploie, mais en la piquant régulièrement. Dans le jeu de cette faufilure, il n’y a que du texte ; l’opération histologique traite un tissu à la pointe d’un instrument de couture qui à *la fois* troue et coud, enfle. Le texte—pour quel hymen—est à la fois traversé et rassemblé. Le « chiffre de pirouettes prolongé vers un autre motif » est, comme tout le texte, chiffré à la puissance deux. Il se remarque dans son chiffre en ce que, signifiant la pirouette de la danseuse comme chiffre ou hiéroglyphe, il chiffre aussi le signe « pirouette » qu’il fait pirouetter ou tourner sur lui-même comme une toupie, pour désigner cette fois le mouvement du signe lui-même. Le chiffre de pirouettes est aussi la pirouette comme chiffre, comme mouvement du signifiant qui renvoie, à travers la fiction de telle visible pirouette dansante, à un autre signifiant toujours pirouettant, à une autre « pirouette ». C’est ainsi que, comme la pointe de la danseuse, la pirouette est toujours sur le point de trouer d’une signe, d’un rien d’aigu, la page du livre ou l’intimité virginale du velin” (D 294).

[l]es genres, sans fusionner dans un art total (méfiance discrète, ironique mais insurmontable de Mallarmé pour Wagner), ne s'échangent pas moins selon la circulation infinie de la métaphore scripturale, congénères pour ce qu'ils ne montrent quoi que ce soit et se *conjoignent* autour d'un foyer absent (D 298).

This “foyer absent” between the arts would be the precise condition of their *hymen*, “comme paroi séparatrice, comme voile de virginité et [...] comme paroi de contact et milieu de confusion.” As the next section will now begin to explore, Mallarmé reproduces the effects of such an unconsummated *hymen* on the page, mimicking a Wagnerian *Liebesverbindung* but as infelicitous ceremony, estranged sensation, conjugal visit.

8. “hyménographies”

Derrida borrows the word *hymen* from Mallarmé, who uses it in multiple places, from *Hérodiade* to “Mimique.” Most notably for the purposes of this chapter, however, he uses it in reference to the marriage of the arts described in his “Rêverie.” And although it may be less directly apparent in “La double séance,” Derrida was very aware of this post-Wagnerian aspect of the term: most explicitly, he cites Mallarmé’s use of the word in the “Rêverie”—“il effectua l’hymen”—among a list of citations at the end of the second session of the seminar (ET 2.13). Significantly later in his career, he also indirectly acknowledged Wagner’s gendering of music and drama in the 1999-2001 seminar series on the death penalty.²⁰⁶ But as Derrida uses the term *hymen* (in “La double

²⁰⁶ Derrida: “It is at the end of section 5 of the Third Essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*. Linking the ascetic ideal of disinterest to Wagner and then, or first of all, to Schopenhauer, [Nietzsche] sees in the ascetic ideal a decisive influence of Kant on Schopenhauer and of Schopenhauer on Wagner when the latter, Wagner, changed in some sense his concept, his interpretation, his strategy of music. Up until then music was for Wagner a means, a medium, a “woman” Nietzsche even notes in quotation marks (ein “Weib”), a woman who, to be fruitful, increase, bear children, needed a goal, namely, a man, that is to say, she needed drama” (*The Death penalty*, Volume I, 145). Indeed, although he did not publish on him explicitly, Derrida continued to engage with Wagner throughout his career. Consider, for instance, the recordings for three restricted lectures that Derrida gave in 1987, currently

séance,” *Littérature et vérité*, and *L’Écriture et le théâtre*), it not only implies the joining of a marriage, but also, *and at the same time*, a barrier to its consummation. The *hymen* for Derrida is thus what joins by way of division and what, in so joining, divides: “un hymen (d’où procède le Rêve[rie?]), vicieux mais sacré,” says Mallarmé, “*entre* le désir et l’accomplissement, la perpétration et son souvenir (OCM2 178-179; qtd. in D 258; emphasis added).

But if it is a barrier, the logic of the Mallarméan-Derridean *hymen* is not the same as what Derrida calls a “logique de la palissade” (D 262), which would simply *contain* a presence, a pleasure, the fullness of meaning, as a virgin plenitude waiting to be penetrated. The *hymen* is instead a film or a fabric that consistently interposes itself *between* desire and pleasure, between form and meaning, at the border that articulates and (re-)marks their relation to one another:

On passe ainsi de la logique de la palissade, qui fera toujours le plein, à la logique de l’hymen. L’hymen, consommation des différents, continuité et confusion du coït, mariage, se confond avec ce dont il paraît dériver : l’hymen comme écran protecteur, écrin de la virginité, paroi vaginale, voile très fin et invisible, qui, devant l’hystère, se tient *entre* le dedans et le dehors de la femme, par conséquent entre le désir et l’accomplissement. Il n’est ni le désir ni le plaisir mais entre les deux. Ni l’avenir ni le présent, mais entre les deux. [...] Avec toute l’indécidabilité de son sens, l’hymen n’a lieu que quand il n’a pas lieu, quand rien ne se passe *vraiment*, quand il y a consommation sans violence, ou violence sans coup, ou coup sans marque, marque sans marque (marge), etc., quand le voile est déchiré *sans l’être* (ibid.).

Here the Mallarméan figure of the *hymen*, for Derrida, suggestively vacillates from marriage to mucosal membrane to a kind of fabric—and, from the latter, to tissue or textile, marital veil or funereal shroud:

Ἦμην désigne une pellicule, la fine membrane qui enveloppe certains organes du corps, par exemple, dit Aristote, le coeur ou les intestins. C'est aussi le cartilage de certains poissons, l'aile de certains insectes (l'abeille, la guêpe, la fourmi, qui sont des hyménoptères), la membrane des pieds de certains oiseaux (hyménopodes), la taie blanche qui couvre l'oeil de certains oiseaux, l'enveloppe qui gaine la semence ou la graine des plantes. Tissu sur lequel s'écrivent tant de métaphores du corps. / Il existe des traités des membranes ou *hyménologies*, des descriptions des membranes ou *hyménographies*. A tort ou à raison, on renvoie souvent l'étymologie de « hymen » à un radical *u* qu'on retrouverait dans le latin *suo*, *suere* (coudre), et dans *uphos* (tissu). *Hymen* serait un petit lien (*syuman*) (*syuntah*, cousu, *siula*, aiguille; *schuh*, coudre ; *suo*). On fait la même hypothèse, parfois contestée, pour *hymne*, qui ne serait donc pas seulement l'anagramme fortuit de *hymen* [...]. Les deux mots auraient un rapport avec *uphainô* (tisser, ourdir—la toile de l'araignée—, machiner), avec *uphos* (tissu, toile d'araignée, filet, texte d'un ouvrage—Longin), et avec *umnos* (trame, puis trame d'un chant, par extension chant nuptial ou chant de deuil. Littré: « d'après Curtius, ὕμνος est de même racine que ὑφάω, tisser, ὑφή, ὕφος, tissu ; à l'époque reculée où l'écriture était inconnue, la plupart des mots qui servent à indiquer une composition poétique étant empruntés à l'art du tisserand, du constructeur, etc. ». / L'hymen est donc une sorte de tissue. Il faudrait en entretenir les fils avec toutes les gazes, voiles, toiles, étoffes, moires,

ailles, plumes, avec les rideaux et éventails qui prennent dans leurs plis tout—presque—le corpus mallarméen (D 262-263).

The poetic valences of the term *hymen* thus extend, by way of various potentially interwoven etymologies, far beyond the valance of the marital bed—toward other membranes, tissues, cloths, gauzes, veils, lustrous silks, canvases, (spider’s) webs, nets, wefts, wings, feathers, curtains, fans, folds, sewn garments, and then, through this weaving, to writing and even to singing (*hymen/hymne*).²⁰⁷ The Mallarméan *hymen* is thus generally woven into his writing. And inasmuch as a *hymen* can be thought here specifically in relation to a marriage of the arts in Mallarmé’s text, this figure would not simply weave them together into any single comprehensible tapestry or total work of art: they would meet instead only in the Penelopean warp and weft of a certain “voile de généralité” (OCM2 177; D295)—undone just as it is produced, by way of multiple and irreducible interartistic writings, each of which would be joined to the rest in reference to an *absence*:

Si la littérature, la fable, le théâtre, le drame, le ballet, la danse, la mimique sont des écritures assujetties à la loi de l’hymen, ces écritures ne forment pas un seul et même texte. Il y a *des* écritures, des formes et des genres irréductibles. Mallarmé en a esquissé le système. Le commun de ces écritures, nous en avons reconnu la règle sous le nom de *référence écartée, être à l’écart*, ou hymen (D 296).

²⁰⁷ Although *hymen* importantly appears in “Mimique,” Derrida in “La double séance” also suggests its significance in relation to Mallarmé’s “Rêverie:” “sur deux pages [...] se nomment tous les éléments de la constellation : le Mime, l’hymen, le vierge, l’occulte, la pénétration et l’enveloppe, le théâtre, l’hymne, les « plis d’un tissu », le tact qui transforme rien, le « chant, jailli dans un déchirement », la « fusion de ces formes de plaisir disparates » ” (D 263).

All the different interartistic figures in Mallarmé's texts (literature, fable,²⁰⁸ dance, drama, theater, etc.) are thus paradoxically bound in relation to their "référence écartée par la différence" (ibid.), their "production métaphorique incessamment relancé par l'écart de l'être" (ibid.): this kind of marriage, as *hymen*, would no longer (as in Wagner) bring the arts together to express their unified content, but would instead figure each of them in relation to an interruption or corruption of the possibility of such an expression (as has been discussed here in relation to music, pantomime, and dance).

This *hymen*—as incessant reassertion of a gap, an "entre," a "rythme entre les rapports," a "voile de généralité" veiling the consummation of expression—is a general principal of Mallarmé's composition, which even runs through and dif-fuses the *sublexical* features of his language. This means that even the identities of the very words he uses are destabilized.²⁰⁹ Here is Bennington's description of this sublexical division (in terms of how it poses problems for Richard's thematic criticism):

[...] the traditional structure of the sign (textual signifiers name signifieds which we organise thematically) can no longer be relied upon. A first consequence is that syncategorematic terms (which resist nominalisation) can come to the fore in a way thematic criticism would find difficult to read. But this functioning in Mallarmé is further complicated by exploitation of possible play between different syntactic values of the

²⁰⁸ In the "Rêverie," Mallarmé juxtaposes a seemingly idiomatic understanding of "Fable" with Wagnerian "Legend." Were I to expand this already lengthy chapter, I would more directly consider this idea of "Fable" and the fabular. In *Musica Ficta*, Lacoue-Labarthes examines the figure of Fable in relation to the idea of "type" that Mallarmé also brings up in relation to it (*Musica Ficta* 142-144).

²⁰⁹ Derrida: "Le « blanc » supplémentaire n'intervient pas seulement dans la série polysémique des « blancs », mais aussi *entre* les sèmes de *toute* serie comme *entre toutes* les séries sémantiques. Il empêche ainsi toute sérialité sémantique de se constituer, de se fermer ou de s'ouvrir simplement" (D 309-310; also qtd. in Bennington, "Derrida's Mallarmé" 57).

‘same’ word, or words sounding the same (the *Tableau*²¹⁰ looks briefly at *elle/aile* [she/wing], and *lit/lis/lys* [bed/read/lily], and, like “La double séance” itself, *or* [gold/thus]), and this leads inexorably to a break-up of the unity of words which thematic criticism must presuppose, so that, for example, ‘or’, appears not only as a word which might be a noun or a conjunction, but *within* other words such as ‘dehors, fantasmagoriques, trésor’ [outside, fantasmagorical, treasure], etc., and in complicated plays with *son or, sonore* [his gold, sonorous], and even the *English* word ‘or’. And this leads further still to an insistence on the letter ‘o’ or ‘i’, so that Mallarmé’s texts become in some sense (‘ceci, un écrit’) *about* the disposition on the page of letters which in and of themselves have no meaning whatsoever, still less a *thematic* value (“Derrida’s Mallarmé” 57).

Lees provides a musical example of this same sublexical emphasis in the “Cantique de saint Jean” section of *Hérodiane*, suggesting that its final line—“Penche un salut”—can refer both to the decapitated head of Saint John the Baptist that leans on its platter (Marchal, in OCM1 1226), and to the solfège that d’Arezzo derived from the hymn *Ut queant laxis*:²¹¹ “un salut” would thus also homophonically contain “un ça—l’ut” (MW 35). Similarly, the phoneme *si*, in addition to its meanings as French word, also in Mallarmé occasionally analogizes the function of the subtonic or leading tone (as in the “Prelude musicale” to *Hérodiane* or the “comme si” of *Un coup de dés* (OCM1 376-377)).²¹² But again, what counts in these morphemes and phonemes would not be any hidden meaning, but rather the manner in which they are formally distributed

²¹⁰ Derrida also wrote a contribution on Mallarmé for the third volume of Gallimard’s *Tableau de la littérature française*.

²¹¹ A hymn to St. John the Baptist.

²¹² On the valences of “si,” see also: Bertrand Marchal’s commentary on *Hérodiane* in OCM1 1225-1226; Part 1 of Quentin Meillassoux’s *Le nombre et la sirène*; and Lees’s interesting if somewhat overly literal interpretation of “La pénultième est morte” in “Le démon de l’analogie” (MW 29-30; 188-192). This phoneme will also be discussed below in terms of Mallarmé’s “Hommage.”

throughout Mallarmé's writing, and the manner in which they produce a kind of textual fabric draped over the surface of his language, veiling and disrupting the stability of its expression of semantic content.

In this sense, Mallarmé can be seen to privilege a certain *syntax* over his semantic uses of language. Derrida writes of "l'excès irréductible du syntaxique sur le sémantique" in Mallarmé's poetry (D 272 (qtd. in Bennington, "Derrida's Mallarmé" 56); see also ET 5.7-12). For this reason, in both *L'Écriture et le théâtre* and "La double séance," Derrida cites Mallarmé's self-description as not a poet at all, but instead as a "syntaxier:"

[...] si l'on obéit à l'invitation de ce grand espace blanc laissé à dessein au haut de la page *comme pour séparer de tout le déjà lu ailleurs*, si l'on arrive avec une âme vierge, neuve, on s'aperçoit alors que je suis profondément et scrupuleusement syntaxier, que mon écriture est dépourvue d'obscurité, que ma phrase est ce qu'elle doit être—et *être pour toujours* [...] (OCM2 715; qtd. in D 222 and ET 5.12).

Mallarmé's poetry is "what it must be" and "is devoid of obscurity" not because it is so clear, then—and, clearly, it is not—but more precisely because it disengages itself from the economy of *semantic* expression that would oppose clarity to obscurity in the first place, in which art would either succeed or fail in conferring an ideational or emotional content according to a model that, in the twentieth century, would come to be described as "semiotics." To this semiotics, Mallarmé opposes a form of *syntax* that overdetermines and fragments the semantic content that would otherwise congeal within signs: "[t]out devient suspens, disposition fragmentaire avec alternance et vis-à-vis, concourant au rythme total, lequel serait le poème tu, aux blancs" (OCM2 211; qtd. in Derrida, ET 5.8-9). Such a treatment of written language—not primarily as a lexical collection of individually signifying units, but as marks that can be

arranged in relation to one another to produce various *effects*—is precisely what allows Mallarmé to analogize his writing with arts like music and dance.

This privilege of syntax over semantics in Mallarmé's writing further joins a certain *necessity* with a certain *contingency*: necessity because a syntactical arrangement is fixed on the page, contingency because such a syntactical arrangement is carefully disposed to weave a *hymen* between the marks of writing and their signification or designation. In his seminar, Derrida will go on to call this unity of necessity and contingency more simply Mallarmé's "vers:" "vers comme syntaxe pure et unité inconcevable du hasard et de la nécessité" (ET 6.1). Or: "[c]ette unité de la contingence et de la nécessité, c'est proprement le vers (accord, écho, symétrie, jeu, balancement, suspens de la différence entre les différents, blancs, etc.)" (ET 5.8). Such an understanding of "vers" is therefore not reducible to the alexandrine meter of Mallarmé's sonnets, but more broadly names his formal use of rhetorical, grammatical, typological, metrical, sonic, strophic and anastrophic structures or patterns, at syntactical, lexical, and sublexical levels—as I have only just briefly described—again in order to overdetermine his writing and render its content unstable.²¹³

In this sense, even the word *hymen*, which for a moment might have seemed to provide a kind of cipher for the movement of Mallarmé's writing, will ultimately fail to explain it:

Ce qui compte ici, ce n'est pas la richesse lexicale, l'infinité sémantique d'un mot ou d'un concept, sa profondeur ou son épaisseur, la sédimentation en lui de deux significations contradictoires (continuité et discontinuité, dedans et dehors, identité et différence, etc.). *Ce qui compte ici, c'est la pratique formelle ou syntaxique qui le compose et le décompose.* Nous avons bien fait semblant de tout reconduire au mot *hymen*. Mais le caractère de signifiant irremplaçable, que tout semblait lui concéder, était

²¹³ See also D 342, fn. 65.

placé là comme un piège. Ce mot, cette syllepse, n'est pas indispensable, la philologie et l'étymologie ne nous intéressent que secondairement et la perte de l'« hymen » ne serait pas irréparable [...]. L'effet en est d'abord produit par la syntaxe qui dispose l'« entre » de telle sorte que le suspens ne tienne plus qu'à la place et non au contenu des mots (Derrida, D 271-272; emphasis added).

However, if this figure of the *hymen* ultimately fails to provide any “solution” to Mallarmé’s poetry, it nevertheless does, in its secondary lexical richness, gesture toward an unnamed point of condensation for certain motifs that we will now see recur in Mallarmé’s 1886 “Hommage” to Wagner: *hymen* as Wagnerian marriage of the arts and their mutual displacement, as text(ile) interweaving necessity with contingency, as syntactical disposition folding upon itself in verse. Indeed, although this term does not explicitly appear in the “Hommage,” one would only need to turn the page of *La Revue wagnérienne* to find, two poems later, a piece by Mallarmé’s student, René Ghil, titled “Hymen: La Musique”—the last line of which aptly reads: “Je ne sais quel vœu vague et mortuaire existe” (*La Revue wagnérienne* 337).

9. *Moïpai Moiré*: Wagner’s Shroud and Other Fabrications

“Hommage” was published among several commemorative poems in the January 1886 issue of *La revue wagnérienne* (Wagner had died in 1883). Mallarmé’s is the first poem in the issue, followed by Verlaine’s “Parsifal,” Ghil’s “Hymen: La Musique,” and several other poems (by Stuart Merrill, Charles Morice, and Charles Vignier, de Wyzewa, and Dujardin himself) as well as two essays. Here is the full text of Mallarmé’s “Hommage:”

Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire
 Dispose plus qu'un pli seul sur le mobilier
 Que doit un tassement du principal pilier
 Précipiter avec le manque de mémoire.

Notre si vieil ébat triomphal du grimoire,
 Hiéroglyphes dont s'exalte le millier
 A propager de l'aile un frisson familial!
 Enfouissez-le-moi plutôt dans une armoire.

Du souriant fracas originel haï
 Entre elles de clartés maîtresses a jailli
 Jusque vers un parvis né pour leur simulacre,

Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins
 Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre
 Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins (OCM1 39 and 99).

For almost a century, in the critical reception of this dense and difficult poem, the tendency had been to read it as describing the collapse (*tassement*) of the so-called “old theater,” the old representational theater that pales before the revolutionary immediacy of Wagnerian drama. And there is much evidence in the poem to support this reading: for instance, the first quatrain provides images of a curtain (*moire, pli*) silently falling over the theatrical décor (*mobilier*) as the central pillar (*principal pilier*) of the theater crashes down. Derrida engages with this interpretation in the sixth session of his seminar, which he devotes entirely to a reading of the poem. In 1983, however, an archival discovery of a short letter that Mallarmé addressed to his uncle Paul Mathieu rather drastically changed the way in which this poem has been understood. About a month after having published the “Hommage,” Mallarmé wrote in this letter that

[l]’hommage est un peu boudeur ; c’est, comme tu le verras, la mélancolie plutôt d’un poète qui voit s’effondrer le vieil affrontement poétique, et le luxe des mots pâlir, devant le lever de soleil de la Musique contemporaine dont Wagner est le dernier dieu (OCM1 791).

Taking this letter into account, the subject of the poem shifts from the celebration of Wagner’s accomplishments to a sulking, almost elegiac commentary on the manner in which the latter’s

dramatic art has eclipsed the role of the poet: at the least, then, this poem should probably not be understood to be celebratory of Wagner in any simple way. Rather, one would want also to recognize, with Marchal, the fact that “cet hommage boudeur n’est pas dépourvu d’ironie” (OCM1 1198).

All considered, however, and even in light of the 1886 letter, it would be inaccurate to portray Mallarmé’s “Hommage” as conforming to *either* of these interpretations—as celebration or as sulking critique, whether of the old theater or of poetry. Certainly it *suggests* each of these possible interpretations, but what it accomplishes is not any one of them (nor their sum total). Mallarmé’s words do not lend themselves to this sort of interpretation firstly because they are not coherent entities in themselves: “[t]out devient suspens, disposition fragmentaire” (OCM2 211). In this sense, Saunders writes:

In the “Hommage,” [...] contact between words is semantically foreign: [...] words contaminate one another with radically foreign significance, with significance, that is, that makes words anomalous to their own meaning (1110).

This suspension and contamination of any definite meaning in the poem takes place in multiple observable ways, which Derrida and many other readers of Mallarmé have recognized and catalogued. This is especially true of the poem’s intertextual and sonic qualities, which I will now examine in turn.

1. The “Hommage” can be and has been characterized by its relation to several potential intertexts, through which Mallarmé refers both to other writers and to other parts of his own oeuvre. However—and this bears repeating—simply gathering up Mallarmé’s intertexts will not lead us any closer to establishing a meaning within the poem (since, as Derrida writes: “il n’y a

pas ici de dedans du poème” (ET 6.11)). It will, however, multiply the potential *jouissances* of its reading.²¹⁴

One fairly well-documented intertext, for instance, would suggest that even the identity of the person about whom Mallarmé writes the poem is somewhat uncertain. In this regard, Austin points out that several of the poem’s connotations may refer to Théophile Gautier’s posthumous *Histoire du Romantisme* (1874), and especially to an article contained within it titled “Vente du mobilier de Victor Hugo” (“«Le principal pilier»” 172). There, Gautier writes:

S’il y a quelque chose de triste au monde, c’est une vente après décès. [...] Mais ce qu’il y a encore de plus morne et de plus pénible à voir, c’est la vente du mobilier d’un homme vivant, surtout quand cet homme se nomme Victor Hugo (Gautier, *Œuvres Complètes* 11 126; qtd. in Austin, *ibid.*).

As Austin notes (in reference to the pre-1983 “theatrical” understanding of the “Hommage”), this selling off of furniture contextualizes Mallarmé’s otherwise strange choice of *mobilier* rather than *décor*s (“«Le principal pilier»” 171). Alternatively, according to a post-1983 “boudeur” interpretation of the poem, the link to Gautier may also gesture toward Mallarmé himself, who would become a living-dead subject alongside Hugo—the subject of a “vente de mobilier d’un homme vivant”—in the wake of Wagnerism.²¹⁵ Other words from Gautier that, according to Austin (*ibid.*), are conspicuous in Mallarmé’s poem include *familier*, *hiéroglyphes*, and potentially *manque de mémoire* (“tous ces petits objets *familiers* [...] commencer ailleurs une autre existence, *souvenirs abolis*, *hiéroglyphes* indéchiffrables désormais” (Gautier, *Œuvres Complètes* 11 126; emphasis added)), as well as *triomphales* (“les soirées *triomphales* d’*Hernani*, de *Lucrèce Borgia*, de *Ruy Blas*” (Gautier, *Œuvres Complètes* 11 128; emphasis

²¹⁴ Mallarmé, from an interview with Jules Huret: “Nommer un objet, c’est supprimer les trois quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite de deviner peu à peu: le *suggérer*, voilà le rêve” (OCM2 700).

²¹⁵ Charles Chadwick already suggests this possibility (“More on Moire” 18-19).

added) and *dieu* (“le *dieu de la poésie*, que nous n’abordions qu’avec des terreurs et des tremblements, aurait un jour besoin du secours de notre plume” (ibid.; emphasis added)). On the basis of this evidence, Austin claims that Hugo—who had only just passed away in May 1885, within a year of the publication the “Hommage” and two years after Wagner’s own death—would have been the subject of an unspoken elegy or unsung requiem within the poem (“«Le principal pilier»” 170-171). Derrida also recognizes the presence of Hugo in the poem, but in relation to other writing by Mallarmé rather than Gautier:

Cette fois le grand mort, c’est Victor Hugo. Et dans le paragraphe qui précède l’annonce de la “mort de Victor Hugo,” on retrouve les mêmes lieux et les mêmes mots que dans l’Hommage à Richard Wagner: “La littérature ici subit une exquise crise, fondamentale. / Qui accorde à cette fonction une place ou la première, reconnaît, là, le fait d’actualité : on assiste, comme finale [orchestre, etc.] d’un siècle [Victor Hugo : ‘le siècle avait deux ans...La légende des siècles], pas ainsi que ce fut dans le dernier, à des bouleversements ; mais, hors de la place publique [com...], à une inquiétude du voile [mobilité...] dans le temple [Hommage] avec des plis [...] significatifs et un peu sa déchirure” (Hiver comme hymen) (ET 5.11).²¹⁶

Through this “voile dans le temple avec des plis significatifs et un peu sa déchirure,” Derrida proceeds, later in his seminar, toward Mallarmé’s “Solennité” and the language that he uses to comment upon the nineteenth-century confrontation between Hugo and François Ponsard:

²¹⁶ This passage, which is referencing *Crise de vers*, also informs the final mention of the “Hommage” in the very dense antepenultimate and penultimate paragraphs of “La double séance:” “L’*Hommage* à Wagner s’y balance aussi. Cette fois, la dépouille mortelle, c’est Victor Hugo. Mais dans les deux textes, même structure, mêmes mots, mêmes voiles et pli et « un peu sa déchirure ». Même envers frayed, traversé, inversé, versifié, diversifié. / Hymen selon le vers, blanc encore, de la nécessité et du hasard, configurant le voile, le pli et la plume, l’écriture s’apprête à recevoir le jet séminal d’un coup de dés” (D 345-346).

[...] la vieille toile, le vieux vêtement, le voile, la déesse, la déchirure, le deuil reforment leur groupe et il s'agit encore de théâtre : "ils ont, à ce qu'était leur âme, ajusté pour vêtement une guenille usée jusqu'aux procédés et à la ficelle plutôt que d'avouer le voile de la Déesse en allé dans une déchirure immense ou le deuil." / Cette Déesse et cette déchirure est aussi à lire dans le pli entre l'*Hommage* et la *Rêverie* et dans ce pli se confirme qu'il faut bien sentir comme une déchirement/déchirure le mouvement général de l'*Hommage* et l'apparition du dieu Richard Wagner (ET 6.12).²¹⁷

According to this reading, then, the bursting forth (*jailli*) or the dawn ("lever de soleil," OCM1 791) of *le dieu Richard Wagner* would be a splitting or tearing of a textual veil by his horns, the sounds of which already swoon on the silent vellum or the mute writing (D 295) of their score ("Trompettes tout haut d'or pâmé sur les vélins [...] Mal tu par l'encre même en sanglots sibyllins"). But if his drama would supposedly tear through the mute veil of writing—of "die stummen Mitlauter," as Wagner put it (OD 218)—with the vocalic expression of a primal immediacy, the immediate identity of Wagner himself would be nevertheless displaced by Mallarmé's text, his "Hommage" already interwoven within the figure of another mourning, the *dieu Richard Wagner* rising over a horizon set by Hugo's Romanticism (by "le dieu de poésie," as Gautier described him). In this sense, then, Derrida argues that in Mallarmé's poem even "le nom de Richard Wagner n'aura pas de référent absolu, sera lui-même entraîné dans une chaîne de traces signifiantes" (ET 6.7).²¹⁸

But if the figure of "the god Richard Wagner" is caught up in a signifying chain that contaminates or corrupts any single or direct reference to the man Richard Wagner, Mallarmé's poem can still be seen to allude to certain biographical moments from the composer's life: for

²¹⁷ See also Austin, "«Le principal pilier»," p. 171.

²¹⁸ Joseph Acquisto similarly observes, in *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music*, that "by 1885, Richard Wagner had become a text" (47).

instance, the “souriant fracas originel hai” out of which Wagner arises. Austin suggests (following Léon Durocher’s 1896 interpretation) that:

[Mallarmé] pense peut-être à la chute de *Tannhäuser* en 1861, et à l’opposition que rencontrait en 1885-87 le projet de donner à Paris des représentations de *Lohengrin*. S’il en est ainsi, le *souriant fracas* serait la musique française (Meyerbeer, Gounod, Bizet), gai et bruyant *originel*, parce qu’il occupait la scène avant Wagner (“«Le principal pilier»” 177).

Here the *fracas* could indeed be a certain preceding music (which Wagner had himself criticized as mere “Effekt”), but it is also, as Austin says, the *fracas* of the Parisian public that had driven Wagner to pull *Tannhäuser* from the stage (and that had outright prevented Carvalho’s staging of *Lohengrin* even twenty-five years later): this *fracas* would have led Wagner instead to premier his works on the “parvis” of Bayreuth that was “né pour leur simulacre” (Austin, “«Le principal pilier»” 177).

Of course, this historical *fracas* would then inevitably also lead back through Baudelaire’s *Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris*. In Baudelaire’s pamphlet, one finds another potentially uncoincidental constellation of the poem’s vocabulary, such as *pilier*, *familier*, *clarté*, *jaillir*, and *hiéroglyphes*. To the extent that Austin may be correct in erecting Hugo as the “principal pilier” described in the first quatrain of the poem, this Romantic *pilier* would be also to some degree a repetition of Baudelaire’s description of nature as a temple of “vivants piliers” in “Correspondances,” the first two quatrains of which he cites in the *Tannhäuser* essay.²¹⁹ Perhaps, then, the collapsing *pilier* in Mallarmé’s poem is not only the old

²¹⁹ “La nature est un temple où de vivants *piliers*
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles ;
L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l’observent avec des regards *familiers*.”

theater and literature of Victor Hugo, but more broadly a certain familiar conception of nature—which persists through the developments of the nineteenth-century European Romanticism that Baudelaire complicates, and which lasts through the naturalism that Huysmans rejects—a nature that Wagner would otherwise sublate into his spiritual art.²²⁰

Similarly, *hiéroglyphes* appear in Baudelaire's essay in a quotation of Liszt, in which the latter defends Wagner from the usual criticism of his music as “vagues nerfs.” For Liszt, this is anything but the case:

[Wagner's] persistance systématique est jointe à *un art de distribution* qui offrirait, par la finesse des aperçus psychologiques, poétiques et philosophiques dont il fait preuve, un intérêt de haute curiosité à ceux aussi pour qui les croches et doubles croches sont *lettres mortes et purs hiéroglyphes*. Wagner, forçant notre méditation et notre mémoire à un si constant exercice, arrache, par cela seul, l'action de la musique au domaine des vagues attendrissements et ajoute à ses charmes quelques-uns des plaisirs de l'esprit (Liszt, qtd. in OCB2 802).

Here Liszt emphasizes Wagner's compositional rigor, describing it in terms of a certain rhetorical arrangement—“un art de distribution”—that would satisfy all those Baroque sensibilities that demand the formal *dispositio* of a piece instead of its emotional content (here referring most likely to Hanslick). And it would seem that this “art de distribution” refers not only to Wagner's leitmotivic composition but also to his seamless integration of language and music according to poetic principles like *Stabreim*. In this gesture, however, Liszt also seems to

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la *clarté*,
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent” (cited above; emphasis added).

²²⁰ In “Wagner and Program Music,” Dahlhaus figures Wagner as a Hegelian composer.

admit certain “lettres mortes et purs hiéroglyphes” into Wagner’s music drama, if only for a moment. If, therefore, some readings of the “Hommage” (cf. Lees, Austin) understand the figure of *hiéroglyphes* as a metaphor for the “dead letter” of poetry in relation to the vitality of music, then this musical vitality—through a citational chain that passes from Baudelaire to Liszt—can also be seen to arise only in relation to the mute, dead writing that it is supposed to escape (more on this in a moment).

Finally, the “clartés maîtresses” between which Wagner “a jailli” also can be found in Baudelaire’s citation of a passage by Wagner himself, who writes the following in an 1860 letter to Berlioz:

Je me demandai quelles devaient être les conditions de l’art pour qu’il pût inspirer au public un inviolable respect, et, afin de ne point m’aventurer trop dans l’examen de cette question, je fus chercher mon point de départ dans la Grèce ancienne. J’y rencontrai tout d’abord l’œuvre artistique par excellence, le *drame*, dans lequel l’idée, quelque profonde qu’elle soit, peut se manifester avec *le plus de clarté* et de la manière la plus universellement intelligible. [...] Ceci me conduisit à étudier les rapports des diverses branches de l’art entre elles, et, après avoir saisi la relation qui existe entre la *plastique* et la *mimique*, j’examinai celle qui se trouve entre la musique et la poésie : *de cet examen jaillirent soudain des clartés qui dissipèrent complètement l’obscurité qui m’avait jusqu’alors inquiété* (Wagner, as cited in OCB2 789; qtd. in Derrida, ET 2.8-9; emphasis added).

This sudden “jaillissement des clartés” here seems to echo Rameau’s “discovery” of the *corps sonore* over a century earlier (as yet another magical guarantee for musical expressiveness: “Le

premier son qui frappa mon oreille fut un trait de lumière” (Rameau, *Writings* v. 3, 12 [172])).²²¹ Though only a coincidence, stemming more from a generalized jargon of enlightenment than any direct quotation, a second strange juncture between Wagner and Rameau can be nevertheless found alongside it, in the claim that Baudelaire makes just before introducing the letter to Berlioz: in reading Wagner, Baudelaire “sentai[t] revivre dans [s]on esprit, comme par un phénomène d’écho mnémonique différents passages de Diderot qui affirment que la vraie musique dramatique ne peut pas être autre chose que le cri ou le soupir de la passion noté et rythmé” (OCB2 788; cited above). As I have argued already, this reference to Diderot likely implies the latter’s own citations of Rousseau in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. But here one might also consider additional passages from Diderot’s text, such as the following one, in which the nephew *mimes* a series of musical performances:

Mais vous vous seriez échappé en éclats de rire à la manière dont il contrefaisait les différents instruments. [...] Il faisait une chaleur à périr ; et la sueur qui suivait les *plis* de son front et la longueur de ses joues, se mêlait à la poudre de ses cheveux, ruisselait, et sillonnait le haut de son habit. Que ne lui vis-je pas faire? Il pleurait, il riait, il soupirait il regardait, ou attendri, ou tranquille, ou furieux ; c’était une femme qui *se pâme* de douleur ; c’était un malheureux livré à tout son désespoir ; *un temple qui s’élève* ; des oiseaux qui *se taisent* au soleil couchant ; des eaux ou qui murmurent dans un lieu solitaire et frais, ou qui descendent en torrent du haut des montagnes ; un orage ; une tempête, la plainte de ceux qui vont périr, mêlée au sifflement des vents, au *fracas* du tonnerre ; c’était la nuit, avec ses ténèbres ; c’était l’ombre et le *silence*, car le silence même se peint par des sons (*Le Neveu* 206-207; emphasis added).

²²¹ See Chapter 1.

Each of the words highlighted in this passage—*plis, se pâmer, se taire, fracas, silence*—reappear in the “Hommage” in various forms (except for the image of “un temple qui s’élève,” which appears in the “Rêverie”).²²² But by this point, we will have moved well beyond the possibility of confirming the intent of an authorial authority that, despite the entire twentieth century, so many scholarly norms implicitly or explicitly still continue to demand. Indeed, it would be necessary here to admit that such tenuous intertextual linkages do not necessarily prove any direct line of influence—but it is perhaps also the case that this ornate series of referrals (Gautier, Hugo, Baudelaire, Liszt, Diderot, Rameau), which might or might not be interwoven here, in varying degrees and *in potentia*, within the fraying fabric of this single sonnet, will have helped to call into question the traditional predicative logic through which any unified authorial subject called “Mallarmé” would be simply presumed to depict or comment upon a unified poetic object called “Wagner” in this poem.

2. The semantic content of the “Hommage” is further displaced by an attention to the poem’s *sonic* qualities (often as they are arranged by its “syntax”). For instance, Pearson identifies the recurrence of the phoneme “si” throughout the poem: “[b]eginning with ‘Le silence’, the poem seems to be written in the key of ‘si’: ‘silence’ — ‘Dispose’ — ‘pli seul’ — ‘principal’ — ‘Précipiter — ‘si vieil’ — ‘frisson’ — ‘enfouissez’ — ‘parvis’ — ‘simulacre’ — ‘sibyllins’” (*Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186). As has already been remarked above, *si* for Mallarmé functions in multiple registers, as both a conditional conjunction and as the name for the subtonic in solfège. In terms of the latter, the repetition of *si* can be seen specifically to mimic Wagner’s own compositional style, remaining perpetually at the level of the leading tone, thus suggesting the suspended chords and deceptive cadences through which Wagner avoided

²²² Yet other noteworthy images in this passage include the setting sun (as opposed to the rising sun of Mallarmé’s Wagner), flowing water (cf. Mallarmé’s “ruisseau primitif”), and mountains (cf. Mallarmé’s “montagne sainte”).

tonal resolution in his unending melody. In this sense, the poem is phonetically crosscut by the sign of an unresolved demand for resolution.

From a more structural perspective, readers have also noted that Mallarmé uses the traditional volta between the octave and the sestet of the sonnet to suggest an effect of contrast between a funereal silence and Wagner's booming "trompettes tout haut." Austin, for his part, describes this contrast in terms of musical dynamics: "s'efforçant d'imiter la technique de la composition musical, il commence par le *pianissimo* obscur et mystérieux des quatrains, pour s'élever, dans les tercets, par un rapide *crescendo*, jusqu'au *fortissimo* de la fanfare des trompettes qui proclament le sacre de Wagner" ("«Le principal pilier»" 180). Derrida in this regard also spends a good deal of time tracing out this sonic pivot in the poem: "[s]tructure du sonnet : opposition de deux longs quatrains et à deux tercets. Cette longueur et cette brièveté n'est pas seulement celle de la durée et de l'espace, de durée d'une lecture et de l'espace sur la page. L'opposition du long et du bref est marquée dans la syntaxe et dans les sonorités du poème" (ET 6.3). He then goes on to explain at length how the syntax and the sonorities of the first half of the poem might produce an effect of slowness:

Les deux premiers quatrains ne sont pas seulement plus longs, ils sont écrits de telle sorte qu'ils produisent un effet de longueur, de lenteur, et de langueur. À quoi cela se marque-t-il ? D'abord dans la syntaxe, qui comporte plusieurs propositions principales et subordonnées relatives, alors que les deux tercets ne sont qu'une seule indépendante. On pourrait analyser cette longueur, lenteur, langueur dans la syntaxe des deux quatrains. Mais elle est aussi marquée par un complexe signifiant/signifié (son/sens). Les deux quatrains s'ouvrent avec la lenteur d'une procession funèbre ou d'une marche funèbre. Lent et long mouvement, long et lent silence d'une marche, comme procession et comme

musique. (ET 6.34). / [...] [C]ette sombre et morne veille est aussi sensible dans deux effets phoniques : les lentes sonorités en *en* : *silence*, *tassement*, *manque* (silence et manque disent dans leur suspens, entre eux, dans leur hymen : l'absence : jeu d'un signifiant d'un côté : *ence* et d'un signifié de l'autre : *manque*.....) ; et les rimes en oir (moire/mémoire, grimoire/armoire). Elles disent à la fois la mort et le passé (linceul brillant comme un miroir : mort; mémoire comme fermoire ou armoire où sont enfermés les vestiges d'un passé, grimoire où sont recueillis les signes et où sont griffées comme en secret les traces téstemantaires. Ce qui dure dans ce jeu des rimes en *oir*, c'est le temps d'une veille presque interminable (ET 6.5).

Derrida goes on to describe how “[d]e cette grande chambre de sombre et lente résonnance, à ce temple des quatrains, nous sortons très vivement au grand jour, d'un seul coup de cymbale, ou de trompette” (ET 6.5): this gesture of emergence or eruption in the tercets is for Derrida characterized by words suggesting movement—*jailli*, *né*, *pâmé*—as well as sound—*fracas*, *trompettes tout haut*, *sanglots*—and light—*clarté*, *or*, *irradiant*.²²³ Similarly, he supposes that—as against the slow sonorities in “oir” and “en”—the tercets repeat more vibrant “a” sounds (*fracas*, *simulacre*, *pâmé*, *irradiant*, *sacre*, *mal*, *clarté*, *parvis*, and even “Richard Wagner”), through which he hears echoes of the brilliances of *blanc* and *nacre* (ET 6.6) erupting from the deathly and dark “temple des quatrains” (ET 6.5). It goes without saying that the extent to which these sounds in the poem “actually” function in such ways is not objectively determinable. Yet, what this exercise²²⁴ nevertheless shows is the extent to which the texture of Mallarmé’s writing

²²³ Derrida also suggests (ET 6.5-6) that Wagner is figured in the poem not only as a god but as a *sun*, thus offering an interpretation of the poem that would be later supported by Mallarmé’s letter to Mathieu, in which he describes “le lever de soleil de la Musique contemporaine.”

²²⁴ For Derrida, this speculation is explicitly an exercise, in which he pretends to adopt the naïve position of a hypothetical “lecteur fictif” (ET 6.6; also ET 6.3) who is only equipped with a knowledge of the French language and its grammar, and no prior historical knowledge.

cannot be seen to be straightforwardly graphic: instead, it would weave together both the sonic and the graphic elements of the signifier,²²⁵ deploying each in order to dislodge and relativize its identity *as* a signifier in the first place.

This latter tendency has already been discussed above with regard to Mallarmé's general emphasis on the sublexical elements of his writing, but specific examples can now be discussed in the context of the "Hommage." Consider, for instance, the first two lines of the poem: "Le silence déjà funèbre d'une moire / Dispose plus qu'un pli seul sur le mobilier." Here the word "Dispose" suggests a certain disposition, a rhetorical or syntactical arrangement, that would produce more than one fold (*plus qu'un pli seul*). This *pli seul* is the grammatical object that signifies what the silence of the previous line will arrange to be more than one, but it is also *itself* the referent of its own signification. This is to say that, in addition to what they signify, the words *pli* and *seul* also have been themselves *disposé* on the page—since, as Derrida observes, the formulation *pli seul* "ne se justifie pas du point de vue de la grammaire habituelle et de la dénotation" (ET 6.11). In other words, *pli seul* should be *seul pli*: the words have been literally (re)arranged. Derrida then begins to hear the phonetic rustling of more than one fabric folded within this syntactical (re)arrangement—first a surplice (*surplis*) and then a shroud (*linceul*):

[...] contagion de pli seul avec surplis: "vêtement de *lin* à manches larges (je cite Littré), souvent plissé, que les prêtres portent sous la soutane...". Ce lin—non marqué—tisse entre eux le pli seul et le linceul ; et il ressurgira à l'autre bout du poème sous l'espèce du vélin. L'aimantation cachée du surplis accuse l'atmosphère religieuse de tout ce théâtre-temple-caveau (ibid.).

Inverting the *pli* and the *seul* to their grammatically "correct" order produces a nearly homophonic relation—or *contagion*, Derrida says here—of *seul pli* with *surplis*, a holy vestment

²²⁵ One will remember that the "signifier" for Saussure is first of all an "acoustic image."

that then provides the *lin* for a *linceul* to resound within the *pli seul*—as a phantom presence reinforced by way of a detour through the *lin* that appears later in *velin* (and again in *sibyllins*).²²⁶ Such figures would be only readable or audible through this silent syntactical inversion or folding of these words upon one another—in their *disposition*.²²⁷

This disposition of silent fabrics inevitably leads one back to the very first line of the poem and toward one of its most complicated threads: the word *moire*. Derrida also seems to acknowledge this word's difficulty when he describes the poem as “un labyrinthe le renvoyant de texte en texte, chaque texte en signifiant un autre, chaque mot et même chaque fragment de mot étant riche de tout un scintillement de reflets, le mot scintillement lui-même, et le mot miroir, etc. étant des mots mallarméens renvoyant à d'autres mots et se retrouvant même dans son sonnet par le relai du mot *moire* et de tout la chaîne qui y est associée” (ET 6.7). Although here Derrida does not explicitly pursue the word *moire* beyond its implications in the poem's broader set of -*oir* rhymes (ET 6.5), several other readers of Mallarmé have detailed the astonishingly polyvalent character of this term. In the 1874 Littré,²²⁸ *moire* (sometimes called “moire antique”) is described as “apprêt[s] que reçoivent, à la calandre ou au cylindre, par l'écrasement de leur grain, certaines étoffes de soie, de laine, de coton ou de lin, et qui leur communique un éclat changeant, une apparence ondée et chatoyante” (“Moire,” *Littré* v. 3, 592). Due to its “ondée et chatoyante” appearance, in English *moire* is also sometimes called “watered silk.” In contemporary parlance, a “moiré pattern” can also more generally describe “a wavy or

²²⁶ See also the pair *lin/velin* (as well as *moire/grimoire*) in Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* (in “Le nourrice: Incantation”): “Elle a chanté, parfois incohérente, signe / Lamentable! / le lit aux pages de vélin, / Tel, inutile et si claustral, n'est pas de lin! / Qui des rêves par plis n'a plus le cher grimoire, / Ni le dais sépulcral à la déserte moire” (OCM1 139). Derrida also mentions this connection in his seminar, and in doing so suggests the additional presence of a *dais* in the “Hommage” (ET 6.12). The poem's invisible *linceul* is further mentioned, though not fully explained, in “La double séance” (D 317).

²²⁷ One might also notice in these lines the presence of terminology drawn from ballet (which is a commonplace for Mallarmé), namely the *posé* embedded in *Dispose* and the *plié* in *pli*.

²²⁸ *Dictionnaire de la langue française, par É. Littré de l'Académie française*, v. 3, “I-P.” Librairie Hachette Et Cie., Paris, 79, Boulevard Saint-Germain, 1874.

geometrical pattern of light and dark fringes (stripes) observed when one pattern of lines, dots, etc., is visually superimposed on another similar pattern, or on an identical one that is slightly out of alignment with the first” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, “Moiré”). In other words, moiré effects arise out of the superposition of two patterns such that they fall in and out of phase with one another (“out of joint,” Hamlet might say), thus producing a shimmering or rippling effect through the syncopated difference or *décalage* between them. Although the Littré does not reference this latter geometrical understanding of moiré patterns, it nevertheless does emphasize a similar effect of variation and shifting perspective: “la beauté de la moire résidant dans la variété des dessins changeant avec la position du spectateur” (“Moire,” *Littré* v. 3 592). Or, again, the entry for “Moiré” describes the “propriété, dans une étoffe, dans un métal, de présenter un dessin dont l’apparence varie avec la position du spectateur” (“Moiré,” *Littré* v.3 592).

The *moire* of the “Hommage” has been interpreted variously as a “dust-cloth” covering the décor of a collapsing theater (Lawler, “Three Sonnets” 92), as a funeral shroud or pall for the theater or for Wagner (Cohn 178; Reynaud 205; Mauron 133; Austin “«Le principal pilier»” 170; Saunders 1116; Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186; Chadwick 18), as a veil of mourning (Reynaud 205; Austin “«Le principal pilier»” 170), and as a curtain (Austin “«Le principal pilier»” 170). Saunders further suggests that the vague and *ondée* character of moire might also imply the successive “*vagues*” of French Wagnerism, and even the “flamboyant dress of Wagner himself” (1116)—for instance, Wagner’s known obsession with pale pink silks and fragrances, which Laurence Dreyfus discusses in extremely interesting detail in the fourth chapter of *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*.²²⁹ Moreover, as Eileen Souffrin-Le Breton argues, moire at the time represented luxury:

²²⁹ In *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse*, Dreyfus argues that Wagner likely even practiced cross-dressing in private, having ordered multiple dresses (among other fabrics, oils, and powders) from Judith Gautier in Paris. Such

The *locus classicus* of the term [*moire*] is a passage of *Le Lutrin* by Boileau [...]. In Boileau there is clearly the association of *moire* and luxury, and that will persist. When in the nineteenth century *moire*, usually silk with a subtle watered pattern, became fashionable, it remained in the luxury class (17).²³⁰

According to this argument, the *luxe* implied by the figure of *moire* would, for Mallarmé, also reflect the “*luxe des mots*” that he describes in the letter to his uncle (ibid.).²³¹ But if the *luxe* of *moire* is a *luxe des mots*, then this *luxe* is also a *lux* (Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance* 181), a light or a shining that would pale before the sun of Wagner’s music (“le *luxe des mots* pâlir, devant le lever de soleil de la Musique contemporaine”).

But the word “*moire*” is not only a figure for this light reading; it is also interwoven with sound and music. Lees (MW 30-32; 227-228; also “Mallarmé’s *Moire*”) and Pearson (*Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186-187) both recognize that the word *moire* was occasionally used in the nineteenth century as a metaphor to describe so-called “Chladni figures” (Figure 3, below). Named for the German physicist Ernst Chladni, these figures could be produced by drawing a violin or cello bow along the edge of glass or metallic plates upon which granules of sand or lycopodium powder had been sprinkled.²³² The vibrations produced by the bow cause the granules to arrange themselves into different geometric and potentially complex patterns, which change based on factors like where one bows on the plate, whether and where one touches it with

permutations of gender can be found also in Mallarmé’s own writing, especially in the several fashion articles he published in *La Dernière mode : Gazette du monde et de la famille* throughout 1874, under feminine and often racialized pseudonyms like “Miss Satin,” and (after Manet) “Olympe, négresse” (Lyu 61-62; Dreyfus 148). In this way, questions of the stability of gender identity—in both Wagner and Mallarmé—can also be seen to be refracted by and wrapped up in this fabric.

²³⁰ Souffrin-Le Breton (17) cites the following passage from Boileau: “On apporte à l’instant ses somptueux habits, / Où sur l’ouate molle éclate le tabis. / D’une longue soutane il endosse la moire, / Prend ses gants violets, les marques de sa gloire.”

²³¹ Similarly, Cohn also argues that “*moire*” signifies the weaving of a “*textus*” (178).

²³² *Scientific American*, Vol. 55, No. 10 (September 4, 1886), p. 151. See below.

one's fingers, and so on. In this way, these Chladni figures offer almost a kind of "hieroglyphic" (i.e. non-phonetic) writing of sound.

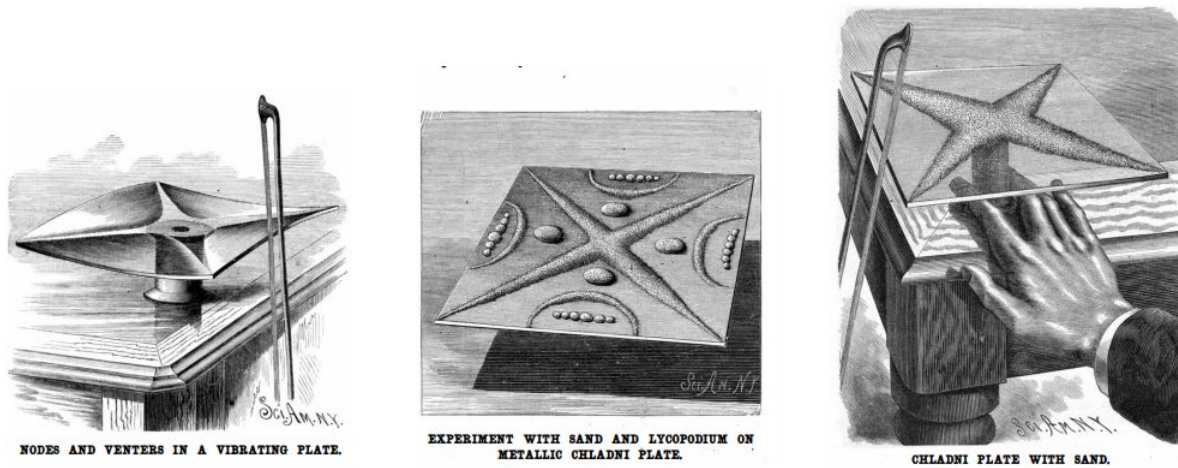


Figure 3. Images of Chladni Plates, from T. O'Connor Sloane in *Scientific American*, 1886

Lees describes how some of the century's writers were fascinated by these patterns: "Many contemporary writers were intrigued by this phenomenon. Théophile Gautier, for example, refers to it in his fantastic tale *Spirite* (1866)" ("Mallarmé's *Moire*"¹⁵; also MW 30). In the passage in question, Gautier seems to echo Baudelaire's shimmering description of Wagner five years earlier (cited above), writing of:

Une lumière fourmillante, brillant comme une poussière diamantée formait l'atmosphère; chaque grain de cette poussière étincelante, comme je m'en aperçus bientôt, était une âme. Il s'y dessinait des courants, des remous, des ondulations, *des moires comme dans cette poudre impalpable qu'on étend sur les tables d'harmonie pour étudier les vibrations sonores*, et tous ces mouvements causaient dans la splendeur des recrudescences d'éclat (Gautier, *Œuvres Complètes* 4, 165; emphasis added).²³³

²³³ This text is also partially quoted in Lees (MW 30). In an earlier response to Lees about the question of "moire" in Mallarmé ("Mallarmé and *La Moire Antique*"), Souffrin-Le Breton categorically denies the possibility that Mallarmé

This aspect of *moire* visualizes sound as another kind of writing: its “voile des sonorités” (Mallarmé, OCM2 203) could be woven and folded like a cloth or a text. Sound would not preexist the disposition of its vibrational frequencies; there would be no pure and vital cry of nature not already subject to such fabrication and thus to death, to a mute writing or the “silence déjà funèbre d’une moire.”²³⁴ From this perspective, Pearson describes how *moire* functions as a metonym for the interwovenness of sound and writing in the poem: “Mallarmé’s ‘moire’ is also a reference to the ‘Hommage’ itself and to the poem’s status as the evidence of a wave-pattern. As the visible aftermath of sound, the ‘moires’ of ‘Hommage’ provide the lines, or ‘plis’, of verse with which to weave a funeral pall for Wagner and Hugo and to leave a trace of their ‘music’ on the harmonic plate of the page” (Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186-187).

Finally, several readers of Mallarmé have observed that “Moiress” is also a French translation or near transliteration of the ancient Greek *Moīrai*, the name of the Fates (cf. Reynaud 204-205; Pearson, *Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186-187; Saunders 1116; Miner, *Resonant Gaps* 140; Cohn 178; also Backès 33). In this sense, Pearson further suggests that, read through this homophonic relation of *moire* and *Moiress*,

‘moire’ may equally constitute a reference to *Götterdämmerung*, which opens with the Third Norn or Fate (the equivalent of the Greek *moira* and in this case the one who can, like a sibyl, see into the future). In her song she perceives a deathly silence (cf. ‘Le silence déjà funèbre’) and foresees the Ash-tree of the World (cf. the ‘principal pilier’)

would have been interested in this science of his day, though one would be harder pressed to demonstrate that he had not read these lines of Gautier.

²³⁴ Using this same logic, Lees argues that for Mallarmé, “[i]n this context, the undulating *moire* refers not to the living sound of music but to its dead and silent ‘shape’, that is, to the wave form by which musical sound is transmitted” (Lees, “Mallarmé’s *Moire*” 14). Lees here is correct, but seems to misvalue his observation. If Mallarmé indeed had this understanding of *moire* in mind, it is likely that he would have been (for reasons already discussed) more interested in and less dismissive of the possibilities inherent in the “dead and silent shape” of a sonic “writing.”

falling to the ground and bringing down Valhalla, the palace of the gods, in the conflagration which will indeed take place at the end of the opera. Since this destruction is to be interpreted as a punishment for an act of *hubris*, the intertextual play further suggests a condemnation of the Wagnerian cult (*Mallarmé and Circumstance* 186-187).

This interpretation, which may at first seem like something of an imposition on the text, is actually more justified than it might appear: as evidence for this interpretation, Pearson, Backès, and Reynaud all note the following description of the Norns from Mallarmé's 1880 translation of George W. Cox's *Manual of Mythology* as *Les Dieux antiques*: "Les Nornes enfin, trois soeurs, correspondent aux *Fates* [*sic*] des Latins ou *Moires* des Grecs ; leurs noms sont Urd, Werdand et Skuld (ou Passé, Présent, Futur). Se les représenter comme des êtres doués d'une sombre et touchante beauté. / Tous, vous avez entendu parler du *Crépuscule des Dieux*, que célèbre aujourd'hui encore le théâtre musical allemand" (OCM2 1470). The Norns, as the personifications of different relations of temporality, "doués d'une sombre et touchante beauté," are directly linked to the *Moires* or the *Fata* in both the English and the French versions of this text. But what is not generally mentioned here is that the implied reference to Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* is not present in Cox's original English, and so would appear to be a specifically Mallarméan embellishment.

Another interesting appearance of the *Moires* in *Les Dieux antiques*, which is also not generally discussed in this context, can be found in the text's description of the tragic fate of Oedipus:

Œdipe se montre comme dominé par une puissance à laquelle il ne peut pas résister. C'est que le Soleil ne peut se reposer dans sa marche : l'astre n'agit pas librement ; et il faut qu'il s'unisse le soir à l'Aurore, de qui il s'est séparé le matin. Cette notion, appliquée à

des actions humaines, devint l'idée de la Nécessité, appelée par les Grecs Ananké, ou de la Destinée qu'ils nomment Moïra. Sens de ce dernier mot Moïra : littéralement un portion ; et dans Homère, c'est l'être qui assigne aux hommes leur part de la vie, soumis strictement à Zeus. Aux poèmes postérieurs, ce personnage devient plus puissant que Zeus et tous les dieux ; et selon quelques versions, il y avait trois sœurs appelées les Moires (en latin, Fates) : nommément Clotho, celle qui file le fil de la vie, Lachésis celle qui le dévide aussi long qu'elle veut, et Athropos, la déité inexorable qui le coupe (OCM2 1522).

This passage contains several remarkable elements, the first of which would be its solar imagery:²³⁵ *les dieux antiques* chain the sun to the same necessity (Ἀνάγκη) that drives Oedipus unwittingly to parricide.²³⁶ As discussed above, Mallarmé also uses the sun to figure the seeming inexorability or necessity of Wagner's emergence onto the scene—both explicitly in the letter to Mathieu ("le lever de soleil de la Musique contemporaine dont Wagner est le dernier dieu") and implicitly in the "Hommage" itself ("Le dieu Richard Wagner irradiant un sacre"). If Wagner is a god, then, he is one of *Ananke*, of the binding of the sun to a non-arbitrary path. This necessity in Wagner has already been considered at length above with regard to his early theory of dramatic expression.²³⁷ However, as Cox and Mallarmé write, such a singular necessity is later divided among the Fates and woven between them. *Moïra* becomes *Moires*: "Déjà funèbre" (since

²³⁵ The sun was an extremely important figure for Mallarmé (cf. Davies *Mallarmé et le Drame Solaire*), which Pearson suggests might have been in part derived from Mallarmé's encounters with Friedrich Max Müller's solar mythology through his friendship with Lefébure (Pearson, *Stéphane Mallarmé* 70).

²³⁶ The figure of parricide recurs in Derrida's writing on Mallarmé, first as the title of its second session of his seminar ("Le parricide—L'autre père: « le dieu Richard Wagner »"), and then again in footnote 8 of "La double séance," in reference to a Platonic double parricide of Homer and Parmenides with regard to the question of mimesis (D 228-229). Parmenides, for his part, "est condamné parce qu'il ignore la mimesis" (D 229, fn. 8). As we shall shortly see, one might—however speculatively—link a certain Wagner with a certain Parmenides, by way of this Derridean parricide.

²³⁷ Consider also the very first words of Part 1 of *Oper und Drama*: "Jedes Ding lebt und besteht durch die innere Notwendigkeit seines Wesens, durch das Bedürfnis seiner Natur" (OD 23) ["Everything lives and lasts by the inner Necessity of its being, by its own nature's Need" (*Opera and Drama* 23)].

Atropos already knows when she will cut the thread), the silent plurality of the *Moires* will “Dispose” (through Lachesis, the apportioner) *plus qu’un pli*: more than one fold in the shroud of fate, a surplus in the *seul pli*, always more than one fraying necessity.

It is possible that Derrida had such a folded fate in mind for the “mot moire et de toute la chaîne qui y est associée” (ET 6.7), particularly at a certain point during a discussion of the relation of mimesis to truth that occurs in “La double séance.” There, he inserts an intriguing footnote into the following detour through Heidegger:

En simplifiant les analyses heideggeriennes mais sans y mettre nécessairement l’ordre de succession que semble y reconnaître Heidegger, on pourrait retenir que le procès de vérité est *d’une part* dévoilement de ce qui se tient caché dans l’oubli (*aletheia*), voile soulevé, relevé, de la chose même, de ce qui est en tant qu’il est, se présente, se produit, étant éventuellement comme trou déterminable de l’être ; d’autre part (mais cet autre procès est prescrit dans le premier, dans l’ambiguïté ou la duplicité de la présence du présent, de son *apparence*—ce qui apparaît *et* son apparaître—, dans le *pli* du participe présent) la vérité est accord (*homoiosis* ou *adaequatio*), rapport de ressemblance ou d’égalité entre une représentation et une chose (présent dévoilé), éventuellement dans l’énoncé d’un jugement (D 237).

Here Derrida is clarifying that, on the one hand, truth could be constituted in a more fundamental unveiling or *aletheia*; and on the other hand, truth could be understood to be simple correspondence (*homoiosis* or *adaequatio*). But between these forms of truth, between parentheses, Derrida goes on to suggest that “cet autre procès est prescrit dans le premier [...], dans le *pli* du participe présent.” And this is where he inserts a footnote that refers his reader to a French translation of Heidegger’s short essay entitled “Moira (Parmenides VIII, 34-41).”

Toward the end of “Moira,” Heidegger figures the relationship between Being and beings in Parmenides as a “Zwiefalt”—which has been translated into English as “twofold,” but which is rendered more simply as “Pli” in the French translation that Derrida references (found in *Essais et Conférences*). For Heidegger’s Parmenides, there is no essential separation between Being and beings, but only a *folding* (of difference) within a kind of monism of Being. In line 37 of Fragment 8, Parmenides suggests that beings appear in this manner through the determination of *Moīpa*—a principle of fate or apportionment that Heidegger translates as *Zuteilung*. With this in mind, here is the beginning of how Heidegger reads the Parmenidean figure of *Moīpa* (in Derrida’s suggested French translation):

Parménide parle de l'έόν, de la présence (des choses présentes), du Pli, mais nullement de l'« étant ». Il nomme la *Moīpa*, l'attribution [*Zuteilung*], qui accordant répartit et qui ainsi ouvre le Pli. L'attribution dispense le Pli, elle en munit, en fait don. Elle est la Dispensation (*Schickung*), en elle-même recueillie et ainsi dépliant, qui envoie la présence comme présence de choses présentes. *Moīpa* est la Dispensation de l'« être » au sens de l'έόν. C'est celui-ci justement, τό γε, qu'elle a libéré, lui ouvrant l'accès du Pli, et par là même lié à la totalité et au repos, à partir desquels et dans lesquels la présence des choses présentes se manifeste (“Moira,” *Essais et Conférences* 304-305).

Moīpa is thus a “dispensation” or “attribution” (or even disposition) of Being. Here, “*Moīpa* est la Dispensation de l'« être » [...]” translates “*Moīpa* ist das Geschick des »Seins« [...]”:” this translation of *Geschick* as *Dispensation* articulates one sense of this untranslatable word as *zu schicken* or *verfügen*;²³⁸ but in doing so it fails to capture the word’s other meaning, that of *fate*—the *Geschick* of the *Schicksalsgöttinnen*—which David Farrell Krell and Frank A.

²³⁸ *Das Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, Vierten Bandes, Erste Abheilung*. Leipzig, S. Hirzel, 1897, p. 3871.

Capuzzi's English translation accomplishes well in "destining" (but then at the expense of the term's sense of *dispensation*).²³⁹ Both destining and dispensation (as in the English "lot," perhaps), *Moîra* names the principle that determines the angle of the *Zwiefalt* of Being, its fold on the subsequent basis of which beings appear (*erscheinen*) as the beings they are. Importantly, however, for Heidegger this fold of Being is never readable as such. Like the horizon, it perpetually recedes from view:

Dans la Dispensation du Pli [*Geschick der Zwiefalt*], toutefois, c'est seulement la présence qui parvient à paraître [*Scheinen*] et les choses présentes à apparaître [*Erscheinen*]. La Dispensation maintient en retrait le Pli comme tel et plus encore son dépliement. *L'être de l'Ἀλήθεια demeure voilé*. La visibilité qu'elle accorde fait émerger la présence des choses présentes comme « aspect » (εἶδος) et comme « vue » (ἰδέα). En conséquence, le rapport qui appréhende la présence des choses présentes se détermine comme voir (εἰδέναι). Là même où la vérité s'est transformée, devenant la certitude de la conscience de soi, le savoir marqué par la *visio* et son évidence ne peuvent nier leur origine essentielle, tirée du dévoilement qui éclaire. Le *lumen naturale*, la lumière naturelle, ici l'illumination de la raison, *présuppose déjà le dévoilement* [*Entbergung*] du Pli ("Moira," in *Essais et Conférences* 305; emphasis added).

The folding of Being thus recedes as origin and the essence of *Aletheia* remains veiled ("Das Geschick behält die Zwiefalt als solche und vollends ihre Entfaltung im Verborgenen. Das Wesen der Ἀλήθεια bleibt verhüllt" (Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 257)). Theoretical speculation cannot see into the fold of Being since both the light of reason and the light of phenomenological appearance from which it is borrowed will have already presupposed the "unveiling" of beings

²³⁹ For more on *Geschick* (as destining, and also as "sending"), see Krell's *Phantoms of the Other* 210-212; and Derrida's "Envois" (in *La Carte postale* 70-71).

on the basis of this fold, which therefore remains concealed as such (“Le *lumen naturale*, la lumière naturelle, ici l’illumination de la raison, *présuppose déjà le dévoilement* [*Entbergung*] du *Pli*”). To put it in more traditional Heideggerian language, even this revealing is always also concealment—this unveiling is also a *Verhüllung*.²⁴⁰

Read through its implications in “La double séance,” Heidegger’s Parmenides offers another potential resource—admittedly a highly speculative one—for an ontotheological interpretation of the *Moires* in Mallarmé’s poem. The *Zwiefalt* or *Pli* of Being there is also silent, since it will have always already fallen beyond any certitude (“silence *déjà* funèbre”).²⁴¹ But Mallarmé’s writing will have silently disposed always *plus qu’un Pli* (“Dispose plus qu’un pli seul”): it will have mimicked *Μοῖρα* as fate and dispensation but multiplied its *Zwiefalt*.²⁴² Such a multiplication of appearances would already be suggested by the interference pattern of the *moire*, which anamorphically changes its hues depending on the angle from which it is viewed (*Littre* v. 3 592): the folds of the *moire* would ripple and refract any singular shining (*scheinen*), multiplying instead the *appearance* of the names of being that, Parmenides says, mortals mistake for truth (ἀληθῆ, Line 39)—names that flicker superficially on the surface of the folded fabric of Being: “To come-to-be and to perish, to be and not to be, / And to shift place and to exchange

²⁴⁰ Such a Heideggerian concealment would be therefore somewhat different than the concealment that Dahlhaus articulates when discussing the “realization” of “poetic intention” in Wagner: “[t]he “poetic intention,” we read in *Opera and Drama*, is fulfilled in an expression which ‘includes it... in each of its moments, but in each conceals it from consciousness, that is, realizes it’ [...]. ‘Realization’ is a ‘concealment.’ The means by which a poetic intention finds realization is, besides the mimetic-visual representation, the representation in musical and emotional terms of the words in which it is expressed. Therefore, insofar as music is an expression of feeling, realization is a realization in terms of feeling; and only by becoming comprehensible in terms of feeling does an intention legitimize itself as poetic at all” (“Program Music” 5). For Wagner, such a realization *qua* concealment is only the concealment from the understanding of a presence that is nevertheless intuitable through music and feeling; on the other hand, for Heidegger—and for Parmenides—Being will have always already (pre)disposed the conditions on the basis of which intuition takes place at all. As Derrida writes in the first session of his seminar, “La nature est toujours voilée” (ET 1.11).

²⁴¹ Such a view, however, still remains concordant with a Wagnerian-Schopenhauerian Veil of Maya that would bar access to a hidden *Wille*. The Mallarméan twist comes in the following line.

²⁴² Derrida writes “Le pli (se) multiplie mais (n’est) pas (un)” (D 281). This phrase can also be read in the notes accompanying the seminar in the IMEC archives.

bright colour [γίγνεσθαι τε καὶ ὄλλυσθαι, εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί, καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διὰ τε χροῶ φανὸν ἀμείδειν]” (Parmenides, VIII, Lines 40-41, trans. David Gallop). In this sense, the Mallarméan textual fabric would not attempt to unveil any truth behind its signifiers, but only to magnify their unstable glittering through the weave or disposition (μοῖρα) of its syntax, “au bord de l’être” (Derrida, D 265). In the figure of *moire*, then, Mallarmé would thus disseminate the *(er)scheinen* of Being’s *Zwiefalt* through the luster of a less reliable *Zwielicht*.²⁴³ one would be tempted then to oppose this divided and scintillating *Zwielicht* of the Mallarméan *Moires* to the necessary conflagration of the *Dämmerung* predicted by the Wagnerian Norns. And, in this light as well, the radiant figure of the “dieu Richard Wagner,” triumphantly drowning out the more subtle shimmer of the poet’s twilit *moire*, can only shine forth with a glint of irony.

10. Mallarmé on the Programme

This chapter has explored Mallarmé’s relation to Wagner and the general aesthetic context in which it occurred. The contours of this relation may be summed up in the following way:

Wagner’s drama would express a pure and immediate relationship to feeling that the abstract understanding alone will always fail to grasp, whereas Mallarmé’s writing would take a nervous, perhaps even “perverse” pleasure or *jouissance* (OCM2 700) in entangling the possibility of such

²⁴³ From “La double séance:” “L’opération qui n’appartient plus au système de la vérité ne manifeste, ne produit, ne dévoile aucune présence ; elle ne constitue pas davantage une conformité d ressemblance ou d’adéquation entre une présence et une représentation. Ce n’est pourtant pas une unité mais le jeu multiple d’une scène qui, n’illustrant rien hors d’elle-même, parole ou acte, n’illustre rien. Rien que la multiplicité facettée du lustre qui n’est rien. L’idéalité de l’idée est ici, pour Mallarmé, le nom, encore métaphysique, encore nécessaire pour marquer le non-étant, le non-réel ou le non-présent ; cette marque indique, fait allusion sans briser la glace vers l’au-delà de l’étantité, vers l’*epekeina tes ousias* : hymen (proximité et voile) entre le soleil de Platon et le lustre de Mallarmé” (D 257.) Here, between the light of the sun’s Being and its refracted luster, is another link between Mallarmé and Plato, and perhaps also between Mallarmé and Wagner—and then again even between Plato, Wagner, Mallarmé, and Georges Bataille’s Icarian “Soleil Pourri” and “Anus Solaire.” Indeed, in footnote 35 in the *Positions* interview, Derrida says: “Here I permit myself to recall that the texts to which you have referred (particularly “*La double séance*,” “*La dissemination*,” “*La mythologie blanche*,” but also “*La pharmacie de Platon*” and several others) are situated *explicitly* in relation to Bataille, and also explicitly propose a reading of Bataille” (105-106).

expression within a gap or *décalage* opened in the very conditions of its articulation (whether sonic, graphic, mimetic, rhythmic, etc.).

In *Oper und Drama*, for example, Wagner sought to bring the arts into a necessary relationship with one another, particularly—like Rousseau—in relation to an organic and primal unity between language and musicality. If this could be accomplished, his drama would no longer need to borrow its expressive force from the abstract representation of events happening outside of it. I have attempted here to show some of the ways in which Mallarmé complicates the terms of this necessary and non-referential expressive ideal; in doing so, however, Mallarmé does not simply oppose Wagnerian necessity with a purely subjective, bourgeois contingency. Instead, he tries to pit the one against the other, attempting to inscribe into his writing what might be called more technically a *necessary corruption of necessity*. In this sense, Mallarmé's poetics, or what can very precisely be called its *tantra*, refuses the Rousseauian hope²⁴⁴ according to which a pure aesthetic experience could be rendered accessible to the subject (whether necessarily *or* contingently) outside of the dispositional structures that will have always mediated, “re-marked,” and thus corrupted it. *Without these corruptions of experience, nothing would occur*: Mallarmé thus writes in *Igitur* of “pureté, qui renferme la substance du Néant” (OCM1 475). And it is in this sense that he can be seen to have adopted as a poetic principle what Derrida in *Of Grammatology* calls Rousseau's “décadence inaugurale.”

Further, Mallarmé's writing—and indeed Derrida's “deconstructive” understanding of it (recontextualized through his seminar)—has been described here as not simply a poetic project, but as one that engages with a very broad interartistic nineteenth-century milieu, at the intersection of several discourses: of literature, yes, but also of music, of theater (opera, dance,

²⁴⁴ In “La Musique et les Lettres,” Mallarmé writes: “Strictement, j'envisage, écartés vos folios d'études rubriques, parchemin, la lecture comme une pratique *désespérée*” (OCM2 67; emphasis added).

pantomime, etc.), of the philosophical relationship between meaning and feeling, of the nationalization and politicization of art, and so on. In the preceding sections, therefore, I outlined how Mallarmé, in perverting the aim of Wagner's project, addresses several theatrical arts in his work. Taking Derrida's readings into account, Mallarmé thus might be seen to offer not only a "grammatological" but also what might be called a "programmatological" reconfiguration of the idea of expression as it manifested in the nineteenth century—by radicalizing a paradox already found in Rousseau. In this way, he set the stage for certain twentieth-century developments in not only literary but also musical modernism.

It is little wonder, then, that Mallarmé's writing was taken up by several influential Western European composers throughout the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the basis for programme music—not only by Debussy, but also by Ravel (*Trois poèmes de Mallarmé*), Hindemith (*Hérodiade* for Martha Graham), Milhaud (*Chansons bas de Stéphane Mallarmé*), and especially Boulez (*Pli selon pli*). Rather than trace out the history of Mallarmé's reception in music, however, in the next chapter I will turn to Arnold Schoenberg, the prototypical "Expressionist" composer, in order to explore how he also similarly recognized and addressed the "written"—i.e., supplementary or prosthetic—character of both musical and linguistic expression. In doing so, I will concentrate particularly on Schoenberg's essays and his compositional techniques as they manifested in his unfinished opera *Moses und Aron*: here, in his intense pursuit of expressiveness, Schoenberg produced a radical relation to a musical writing that he, like Mallarmé, also called the "Idea"—around the absent center of which his compositions swell and contract, permute and repeat themselves. Similarly, in Chapter 4—despite the fact, again, that the more logical move after Mallarmé and Schoenberg would be to turn to Boulez—I will explore the work of Claude Vivier, a queer Québécois composer

associated with the “spectralist” movement of the 1970s and 1980s. I will turn to Vivier rather than Boulez specifically because of the manner in which the former’s music still rather Romantically sought to recover a pure and originary form of expressiveness (which he figures in relation to childhood). As with Schoenberg, I will explore how Vivier, in two of his operatic works—namely *Kopernikus: Opéra-rituel de mort* and *Lonely Child*—consistently interrupts and corrupts the conditions of possibility of his own expression, figuring them in relation to forms of silence and absence.

Yet, if both Schoenberg and Vivier challenge the musical and linguistic conditions of operatic expression in their work, if they end up displacing, rewriting, or “re-disposing” the structures of musical expression in this way, their works are not exactly without feeling. If anything, the contrary is truer. Importantly, then, what I will demonstrate in Schoenberg and Vivier is not simply a purely intellectual or “structural” music devoid of expressiveness, but rather one for which—as in Mallarmé’s writing—*pathetic expression is no longer framed as revelation*. After Mallarmé, in other words, expression only manifests as an effect without a cause, though it is no less real for doing so. The dichotomy between expression and non-expression thus becomes a false one. The veil is no longer lifted, because there is nothing behind it: it remains as a death shroud *at the same time as* the fabric and texture of expression itself.

Chapter 3. Schoenberg and the Compromised Land

[...] *and gather me*
Into the artifice of eternity.
 W.B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”

1. “*es soll nicht sein.*”

Emerging now from the luxuries of Mallarmé, this chapter will open with a gambit on a much more prosaic kind of writing—namely, the memory of a conversation described by Serenus

Zeitblom, the fictionalized academic biographer that narrates Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*:

Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde:

»Ich habe gefunden«, sagte er, »*es soll nicht sein.*«

»Was, Adrian, soll nicht sein?«

»Das Gute und Edle«, antwortete er mir, »was man das Menschliche nennt, obwohl es gut ist und edel. Um was die Menschen gekämpft, wofür sie Zwingburgen gestürmt, und was die Erfüllten jubelnd verkündigt haben, das soll nicht sein. Es wird

zurückgenommen. Ich will es zurücknehmen« (639).²⁴⁵

Leverkühn speaks these words in despair toward the end of the novel, as Echo—his beloved and significantly nicknamed young nephew—dies in bed of a sudden and violent illness. The passage turns on the cataphoric identification of “es” as “das Gute und Edle,” which Leverkühn describes in terms of a jubilatory violence—as ideas that people “have fought for (*gekämpft*), have stormed (*gestürmt*) citadels for.” One might rightly hear in such language of struggle and storm a veiled

²⁴⁵ “‘I have discovered that it ought not be.’

‘What ought not be, Adrian?’

‘The good and the noble,’ he replied, ‘what people call human, even though it is good and noble. What people have fought for, have stormed citadels for, and what people filled to overflowing have announced with jubilation—it ought not be. It will be taken back. I shall take it back’” (Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 501).

reference to something like the Nazi *Blitzkrieg*; however, within the context of the story, these words are uttered in denunciation first of the circumstances surrounding the death of Echo—Leverkühn’s pact with the devil that he made in pursuit of his artistic *ideal*²⁴⁶—and then, from this denunciation, of *any* notion of “the good.” Leverkühn’s claim is thus against the notion of the good *in general*, before it would be appropriated by either fascism *or* democracy, by a conservative or an emancipatory politics.

Arnold Schoenberg, whose compositional method Mann explicitly used as the musical basis for this fictional composer (*Doktor Faustus* 683), seemed to espouse a similar sort of denunciation or renunciation of “the good,” in his famous refusal to identify himself as a revolutionary composer (a gesture diametrically opposed to that of Wagner, one might note), *even as his work undermined some of the most fundamental tenets of Western music*. For this reason, Schoenberg has often been characterized as a “conservative revolutionary” and is discussed by many of his commentators as a contradictory and ambivalent composer (cf. Reich, *Critical Biography* 131, 147; Rosen 9-14; White 46, 228; Adorno, *Prisms* 150-152; Burkholder 162; Ringer 18). Willi Reich, in this regard, even titled his critical biography of Schoenberg *Arnold Schönberg oder Der konservative Revolutionär*. Schoenberg illustrated this ambivalence about his revolutionary status in describing a remark that a superior officer made to him while he was serving in the army during the First World War: “So you are this notorious Schoenberg, then”—to which he replied: “Nobody wanted to be, someone had to be, so I let it be me” (SI 104).²⁴⁷ Or else he explicitly rejected this status altogether: in a 1937 letter to Nicolas

²⁴⁶ Leverkühn’s pact with the devil, which he suggests might have been involved in Echo’s death, is also largely allegorical in *Doktor Faustus* of Mann’s homeland’s fall into inhumanity leading up to the Second World War. Thus questions of art and politics are inseparable in the novel.

²⁴⁷ I will quote *Style and Idea* in English, since it was originally published in English in 1950. Many of the essays or excerpts in this text were also originally written in English, though others were translated from handwritten pages

Slonimsky, he wrote, “Ich persönlich verabscheue es, ein Revolutionär genannt zu werden, denn ich bin es nicht” (qtd. in Reich, *Arnold Schönberg oder Der konservative Revolutionär* 140).²⁴⁸

Or, most explicitly, he claimed: “I was never *revolutionary*” (SI 137).

In this regard, Schoenberg often characterized his music as the mere continuation of a predominantly Germanic tradition. For instance, in his 1931 essay, “National Music,” he claims that “[m]y teachers were primarily Bach and Mozart, and secondarily Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner” (SI 173). Following Leon Botstein, however, one might begin to problematize this picture painted by Schoenberg and his defenders, by recognizing how it functioned as a rebuttal to what was then a common association of his work with scandal and sensationalism—as exemplified for example in Richard Batka’s epithet, “unltravioletten Musiksezeessionisten Arnold Schönberg” (qtd. in Reich *Arnold Schönberg* 44)²⁴⁹ or the Nazis’ designation of Schoenberg’s music as *entartete*. Botstein writes:

If one were only able to throw away the crutches of psychological listening, the defenders [of Schoenberg’s music] say, and respond to music on music’s own unique terms, one would see that Schoenberg is not a radical after all. What makes Schoenberg’s music great are exactly the attributes we locate in Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven: the inspired command of compositional procedures essential to a refined sense of form and unique to the dynamic realization of musical ideas. / The tradition of reception which has identified Schoenberg as a radical conservative or a conservative revolutionary derives from this

in German by one of Schoenbergs former students, Dika Newlin. Others were later added and translated later by Leonard Stein and then Leo Black (SI 3).

²⁴⁸ “I personally hate to be called revolutionist, which I am not.” (qtd. in Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* 131).

²⁴⁹ “ultraviolet musical secessionist Arnold Schoenberg” (qtd. in Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* 36). Batka ascribed this epithet to Schoenberg after a “violent clash” (ibid.) ensued following the initial performance of his second string quartet, op. 10, in 1908.

species of the contemporaneous defense of Schoenberg (“Schoenberg and the Audience” 42).

Such a defensive position would have certainly played a role in Schoenberg’s often rather vehement portrayal of himself as a traditionalist. However, this interpretation of his art still inevitably relies on some fairly nonspecific politico-aesthetic categories—especially those of conservatism and revolution—which end up being more complicated than they might first appear. For instance, Botstein goes on to describe how the very identity of the German national tradition to which Schoenberg claimed to belong would have been destabilized in his frequent appeal to pre-unification sentiments: “By preaching a more authentic and valid characterization of musical classicism, Schoenberg and his defenders also challenged the widespread late nineteenth-century appropriation of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven as uniquely German figures in a post-Wagnerian nationalist sense” (42-43). Or, regarding Wagner and Brahms, the two late-Romantic German composers whom Schoenberg claimed as his predecessors, one might wonder which of their two warring positions should be attributed to him: the supposedly conventional restraint of Brahms, whom the title of Schoenberg’s most famous essay nevertheless labeled as “progressive”? or the hyper-conservative and nationalist legacy of Wagner, who had been a revolutionary composer during his lifetime, and who, had he lived in 1933, as Mann suggested, might have been construed as a “cultural Bolshevik”?²⁵⁰ That Schoenberg counted both of these explicitly antagonistic and contradictory figures among his more important teachers provides a clue as to how one might begin to interpret his fraught status as both conservative and revolutionary. It would indicate, first of all, that these kinds of questions are badly posed, since they attempt to articulate Schoenberg’s music teleologically within a conception of the good, which his work rejects in general.

²⁵⁰ See Mann, “Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner” 253.

With regard to the idea of revolution in music, Jean-François Lyotard (whose reading of Schoenberg will be discussed in more detail below), wrote that

[l]'idée même de révolution appartient à la représentation moderne d'un progrès subit accompli dans la marche vers la liberté. Elle n'a pas de sens en dehors d'une conception qui donne à l'histoire l'émancipation des hommes comme fin ("Musique et postmodernité" 7-8).

Indeed, politically speaking, Schoenberg's later Zionism²⁵¹ would indicate that such an emancipation was never too far from his mind—and necessarily so, given the unimaginable horrors of the Shoah. Schoenberg's work cannot be considered to belong purely and unproblematically to a conservative German tradition without in some sense failing to acknowledge these horrors. But, on the other hand, his aesthetics (as well as his religiosity, which, as will be shown, is closely tied to his aesthetics) also complicates the possibility that one might interpret his work as revolutionary in any simple way, in the sense of an emancipation (whether political or artistic).²⁵² This chapter will explore how Schoenberg's work, even sometimes despite his intentions, formally prevents the expression of any idea of the good that would allow it to be reduced to one of these alternatives. And this will be demonstrated

²⁵¹ Schoenberg's relationship with Zionism is complicated. For instance, his 1927 agitprop play *Der biblische Weg* (The Biblical Way) thematizes philosophical problems of representation in the creation of a Jewish state, which he then carries over into *Moses und Aron* in the 1930's. In *Der biblische Weg*, Schoenberg figures these problems through the character of Max Aruns, who represents both Moses and Aaron in a single person. In this regard, *Der biblische Weg* is an important precursor to *Moses und Aron*—to the extent that Schoenberg even recycled certain lines from this play in his opera. But Schoenberg also wrote political essays that were more straightforwardly programmatic. For example, see his 1938 essay, "A Four-Point Program for Jewry."

²⁵² This is, again, not to say that notions of *emancipation* are not important for Schoenberg. On the one hand, politically speaking, *Moses und Aron* (alongside *Der biblische Weg*) can be seen to dramatize a desire for the emancipation of the Jewish people, especially in the early 1930's. At the same time, musically speaking, the opera also extends Schoenberg's famous notion of an "emancipation of the dissonance," which will be discussed in greater detail below. Certainly the opera lends itself to both of these political and musical interpretations. However, it also calls into question the teleological principles upon which any notion of emancipation would rely.

especially through an analysis of his unfinished serial magnum opus, the opera *Moses und Aron*, which dramatizes a corruption in the *idea as such*.²⁵³

What his opera calls into question, then, is *not politics in general*, but rather the systems of representation upon which the onto-theo-ideological presuppositions—Leverkühn’s “Gute und Edle”—of any conservative or revolutionary (or conservative revolutionary) position would base themselves. These (or any other) interpretations of art that require its subjection to a universalizing idea of the good, and that position it within a grand narrative (whether one of upholding the nobility of an established tradition *or* of rupturing with it) are what this opera challenges—precisely by corrupting the ontotheological guarantee of representation according to which such an idea might become *recognizable* in the first place, as a kind of promised land to be reached across the desert of experience.²⁵⁴ According to this reading, therefore, Schoenberg’s opera is not merely the dramatization of an unnamable transcendental signified (as Derrida might say), whether religious, political, or aesthetic—of, in other words, an unrepresentable presence. It instead rigorously contaminates the ontological status of any such guiding idea in the first place, by reinscribing its possibility *within* the very medium that will simultaneously fail to express it. *This is not at all an apolitical position*. Moses, after all, was Rousseau’s prototypical legislator, yet he “stammers” at the origin of the Law;²⁵⁵ like Moses, as we will see, Schoenberg’s opera

²⁵³ I will stress the word “idea” here because it is an important technical term for Schoenberg. See Section 1 below.

²⁵⁴ One might consider this Schoenbergian gesture, as I will describe it, in relation to Naomi Waltham-Smith’s political, deconstructive reclamation of classical style in *Music and Belonging between Revolution and Restoration*, in which classical style foregrounds musical convention in such a way that the politico-aesthetic conditions that it provides for the possibility of community formation are called into question and then reorganized around the experience of listening as such, in what Waltham-Smith calls, after Derrida, an “exappropriation” of the proper (27; also 78).

²⁵⁵ For interesting exegetical discussions of Moses’s historical speech disorder (or lack thereof), see Marc Shell’s “Moses’ Tongue,” in his book *Stutter*, and Jeffry H. Tigay’s “‘Heavy of Mouth’ and ‘Heavy of Tongue’: On Moses’s Speech Difficulty.” Shell (123-129) argues that although Moses had trouble speaking, he nevertheless possessed a substitute for speech in his knowledge of a Midianite alphabetic writing, which he would use to engrave God’s commandments. Shell plausibly suggests a reading of the story of the commandments in which Moses would have

stammers, it stumbles²⁵⁶ over a *muteness*, a *Stummheit* at the origin of its own expression, and in doing so interrupts its listener's ability to synthesize it according to any universalizing determination that, in Leverkühn's words, "*soll nicht sein.*"²⁵⁷

2. Idea and Expression

Before moving into the details of Schoenberg's opera, however, it will be necessary to briefly take one step back and clarify some of his broader aesthetic concerns, in order to then situate this work in relation to both the trajectory of his own career and the tradition to which he so fervently claimed to belong. In doing so, I will focus here on two terms that appear throughout his writings—"idea" and "expression." Though Schoenberg does not use the latter in any technical sense, it nonetheless occupies a privileged position as, of course, the name of the aesthetic movement ("Expressionism") to which some of his earlier works are supposed to contribute. The former, however, is something of a term of art for Schoenberg.

In his short book on the composer, Charles Rosen describes the works from Schoenberg's Expressionist period (from roughly 1908 to 1913) as his most radical: they "remain an achievement we have not yet come to terms with" (13). This period saw many of Schoenberg's most famous works, such as *Erwartung*, *Pierrot Lunaire*, and *Die Glückliche Hand* (as well as,

supplemented his "heaviness of speech" with this alphabetic writing, thus allowing his reader to relate to a supposedly pure and unbroken voice, without the mediation of images, such as those of Egyptian hieroglyphics

²⁵⁶ "Stammer" and "stumble" are related etymologically: cf. "Stumble" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²⁵⁷ In *Deconstructive Variations* (particularly the chapter titled "Toward a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky"), Rose Rosengard Subotnik discusses Schoenberg and Adorno as the prototype of what She calls "structural listening:" "This concept of structural listening, as Schoenberg and Adorno presented it, was intended to describe a process wherein the listener follows and comprehends the unfolding realization, with all of its detailed inner relationships, of a generating musical conception, or what Schoenberg calls an 'idea.' Based on an assumption that valid structural logic is accessible to any reasoning person, such a structural listening discourages kinds of understanding that require culturally specific knowledge of things external to the compositional structure, such as conventional associations or theoretical systems. [...] Structural listening is an active mode that, when successful, gives the listener the sense of composing the piece as it actualizes itself in time" (Subotnik, 150).

to a lesser degree, *Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten* and the second string quartet). Musically speaking, it is also characterized by some of Schoenberg's most straightforward challenges to tonality. However, as Rosen points out (21-26), Schoenberg's musical experimentation is itself not without precedent—and there is no doubt that Schoenberg also saw things this way.

Discussing the increasing prevalence of tonal ambiguity and chromaticism in the nineteenth century, which perhaps reached its apogee in Wagner (or subsequently in Debussy and Strauss), Rosen writes, “[w]hen we come to Wagner, the expansion of the crucial moment of ambiguity attained monumental proportions. There are many pages where no single phrase can be interpreted as belonging to a fixed key, and where certain chords have more than two possible interpretations” (30). This is to say, then, that traditional harmonic structures based on the triad, and even diatonicism in general, were already breaking down by the time that Schoenberg made the leap to properly “atonal” music.

However, it is also important to note that Schoenberg often enthusiastically disavowed any characterization of his work as “atonal,” preferring instead to claim that his so-called “atonality” did not constitute a negation of the structures of harmony,²⁵⁸ but merely the next step in their centuries-long development, over the course of which certain harmonic customs had gradually become outmoded. He thus occasionally likened traditional tonality to a “procrustean bed” (SI 86, 413). And, in a footnote in his *Harmonielehre*, he wrote:

Davon muß ich mich jedoch abwenden, denn ich bin Musiker und habe

mit Atonalem nichts zu tun. Atonal könnte bloß bezeichnen: etwas, was dem

Wesen des Tons durchaus nicht entspricht. Es ist schon der Ausdruck: tonal unrichtig

²⁵⁸ By tonal harmony, or “tonality,” I mean a reliance on key signatures and modes derived from the diatonic scale, and their deployment according to a hierarchy of chordal structures (especially privileging the triad) and harmonic functions (tonic, dominant, subdominant, etc.). Schoenberg often used the words “tonal” or “pseudo-tonal” as terms to describe in shorthand what he saw as often outdated compositional tendencies among his contemporaries, and his uses of the term are often very nuanced. For more, see Rosen 30-36.

gebraucht, wenn man ihn im ausschließenden und nicht im einschließenden Sinn meint. Nur so kann es gelten: Alles was aus einer Tonreihe hervorgeht, sei es durch das Mittel der direkten Beziehung auf einen einzigen Grundton oder durch kompliziertere Bindungen zusammengefaßt, bildet die Tonalität. Daß sich von dieser einzig richtigen Definition kein vernünftiger, dem Wort Atonalität entsprechender Gegensatz bilden läßt, muß einleuchten (487-488).²⁵⁹

In other words, Schoenberg argues that his supposed “atonality” is not strictly opposed to tonality in general, but only a change in the order in which tones are presented and organized—such that more traditional interpretations of the word “tonality” would be revealed to be limited and inaccurate: “the art of music was never really in possession of a tonality wholly limited to the seven diatonic tones of the scale” (SI 277). Citing composers from Schubert to Reger (*ibid.*), and elsewhere citing even Bach’s use of all twelve tones in Fugue No. 24 in the first volume of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (SI 393), Schoenberg states that “atonality” has always existed alongside and within what had been called “tonality,” which is only a convenient ideological shorthand for hierarchical structures that are inscribed into in harmonic relationships—through which consonance or dissonance exist in proportion to their *comprehensibility* vis-à-vis these structures at any given point in history.²⁶⁰ Schoenberg often called this more ambivalent and

²⁵⁹ “I have to dissociate myself from that [atonality], however, for I am a musician and have nothing to do with things atonal. The word ‘atonal’ could only signify something entirely inconsistent with the nature of tone. Even the word ‘tonal’ is incorrectly used if it is intended in an exclusive rather than inclusive sense. It can be valid only in the following sense: Everything implied by a series of tones (*Tonreihe*) constitutes tonality, whether it be brought together by means of direct reference to a single fundamental or by more complicated connections. That from this single correct definition no reasonable opposite corresponding to the word ‘atonality’ can be formed, must be evident” (Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* 432).

²⁶⁰ Schoenberg wrote that “[w]hat distinguishes dissonances from consonances is not a greater or lesser degree of beauty, but a greater or lesser degree of comprehensibility” (SI 216). Thus, with an increase in comprehension, he had hoped that one day “the concept of tonality will be so extended as to include all sorts of tone-combinations” (SI 280).

open-ended treatment of harmonic rules (in his own “revolutionary” idiom, à la Lyotard) the *emancipation of the dissonance* (SI 217).

Schoenberg’s turn away from diatonicism did, however, present (at least) one unique compositional challenge that had not existed as explicitly before. If the early “atonal” Expressionist works attempted to avoid any tonal center, then the problem arose of how a composer would be able to resolve musical tension—which until that point had been the primary condition for a work’s sense of formal unity and one of the most important factors in the production of musico-aesthetic pleasure. Schoenberg’s solution to this problem was not to look for any new forms of cadence that would perform the same function as before, but rather to displace the primacy of tonal resolution altogether, in favor of dynamics, timbre, and musical texture. By making timbral relationships and dynamics more fundamental to the compositional process, in what would become known as *Klangfarbenmelodie* (or tone-color melody), Schoenberg displaced the privilege of pitch—whether “tonal” or “atonal”—in favor of the aspects of musical sound that historically had been somewhat marginalized: “This emancipation of tone color,” Rosen writes, “was as significant and as characteristic of the first decades of the twentieth century as the emancipation of dissonance. Tone color was released from its complete subordination to pitch in musical structure: until this point *what* note was played had been far more important than the instrumental color or the dynamics with which it was played” (48). In this way, Schoenberg emphasized “a new and more complex set of relationships in which pitch is only one element among others, and not by any means always the most important” (Rosen 50).

By raising the expressive importance of dynamics, timbre, and texture to the level of pitch, Schoenberg and his students opened up many new potential avenues for composition; however, the question of what to do with the practice of cadential resolution was still not quite

answered. Rosen, if we are to continue to tentatively accept his reading of this history, offers the end of *Erwartung* as a good example of Schoenberg's most definitive solution to this problem (57). Here Schoenberg fills out the music with chromatic hexachords distributed at varying rhythms and dynamics across the orchestra, which come together at the end to "saturate the musical space" (ibid.). Rather than locating his work's formal closure in the departure from and return to a tonic, then, Schoenberg provides an alternative sense of unity through the chromatic "saturation" of his work's pitch space, filling out the sound spectrum in order to establish a sense of stasis and order.

The unique manner through which a work would arrive at or establish this sense of order is precisely what Schoenberg calls its musical *idea*.²⁶¹ In his famous lecture from 1946,²⁶² "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea," though still using the language of keys (perhaps for analytical or pedagogical reasons²⁶³), Schoenberg explains his notion of the musical "idea" in the following way:

In its most common meaning, the term idea is used as a synonym for theme, melody, phrase or motive. I myself consider the totality of a piece as the *idea*: the idea which its creator wanted to present. But because of the lack of better terms I am forced to define the term idea in the following manner: / Every tone which is added to a beginning tone makes the meaning of that tone doubtful. If, for instance, G follows after C, the ear may not be sure whether this expresses C major or G major, or even F major or E minor; and the addition of other tones may or may not clarify this problem. In this manner there is

²⁶¹ Of course, to speak of musical "ideas" is a commonplace, but Schoenberg defines this term rather idiosyncratically.

²⁶² The published version of this lecture is based on the one Schoenberg gave at the University of Chicago in 1946, though he had in fact initially delivered this lecture in Boston in 1933/4 (SI 518), not long after having composed the bulk of *Moses und Aron*.

²⁶³ Schoenberg was a renowned teacher, who insisted on teaching in terms of traditional tonality before ever discussing the possibility of moving away from it.

produced a state of *unrest, of imbalance* which grows throughout most of the piece, and is enforced further by similar functions of the rhythm. The method by which balance is restored seems to me the real *idea* of the composition (SI 122-123; emphasis added).

Although Schoenberg himself no longer relied on the departure from and return to a tonal center, he nevertheless continued to employ this movement from tension toward resolution, or from imbalance toward balance, as a central principle for his compositional practice. The *idea* of a work, then, thought rigorously according to this definition, can be understood as the unique synchronic arrangement, or perhaps the *disposition*, of its intervallic relationships—i.e. the arrangement of the differences between its tones and the differences between these differences—such that they move into and out of balance with one another.²⁶⁴ And of course, no longer hampered by tonality, the range within which these arrangements can take place is greatly increased.

If I use the word “arrangement” or “disposition” to describe Schoenberg’s notion of the “idea,” this is not by accident. Here I would be in agreement with Bonds in arguing that the Schoenbergian idea is extremely rhetorical, along the lines of those rhetorical gestures employed by the pre-Romantic theorists and composers of the *Affektenlehre* (see Chapter 1²⁶⁵). In *Wordless Rhetoric*, Bonds writes of how “[c]ertain aspects of [Schoenberg’s] writings, in fact, exhibit much closer ties to the eighteenth than to the nineteenth century” (156). Indeed, in this regard, one might recall how Schoenberg himself explicitly claims Mozart and Bach as his most important teachers, *before* Beethoven, Brahms, or Wagner (SI 173; cited above). Referencing Schoenberg’s essay “Brahms the Progressive,” Bonds continues: “his stance throughout is

²⁶⁴ See also Schoenberg’s writings in *Der musikalische Gedanke und die Logik, Technik, und Kunst seiner Darstellung*.

²⁶⁵ As an aside, in relation to Chapter 1, it would be interesting here to recall the fact that Schoenberg had also, like Rousseau, elsewhere taken a curious interest in the idea of the *recitativo obbligato* (see Chapter 1, Section 6), entitling the last of the *Five Pieces for Orchestra* (op. 16) “Das obligate Rezitativ.”

thoroughly *rhetorical*. He views music as a language in its own right; intelligibility is an essential quality of form” (ibid.; emphasis mine). Finally, Bonds goes on to make a comparison with Mattheson that is worth quoting at length:

“Rhetoric,” in its debased sense, is probably the last term Schoenberg would have wished to use in this context, redolent as it is with the very notions of “empty repetition” and “padding” he sought to avoid. Yet it is precisely rhetoric, in its traditional and more elevated sense, that Schoenberg is evoking here, for he seeks a “logic” by which to connect the presentation of his ideas. The formulation in the last of the passages cited above offers a particularly striking parallel with Mattheson’s image of a musical movement as an oration. Within his listing of the various functions of musical ideas, Schoenberg incorporates the traditional categories of rhetoric almost verbatim (“introductory” = exordium; “establishing” = narratio and propositio; “varying,” “elaborating,” and “developing” = confirmatio; “deviating” = confutatio; “concluding” = peroratio)[²⁶⁶]. There can be no doubt that Schoenberg was aware of the rhetorical source of these categories, even if he was not specifically aware of Mattheson’s or Forkel’s earlier applications of these terms (158).

Rhetorically speaking, this list of categories generally falls under the heading of “dispositio,” the Latin term from classical rhetoric for “arrangement” or “organization,” which would seem aptly to describe Schoenberg’s fixation on the synchronic ordering of a piece’s “idea.”²⁶⁷ Along these lines, then, it will be possible to consider Schoenberg’s musical idea to be, to some degree, structured by a rhetoric.

²⁶⁶ cf. “Brahms the Progressive,” “Connection of Musical Ideas,” and “New Music: My Music” in *Style and Idea*.

²⁶⁷ Lyotard, for his part, also invokes the category of *dispositio* in *Discours, Figure*, and indirectly in his discussions of Schoenberg in “Plusieurs silences,” through his deployment of the term “dispositif.” See below.

But as Pamela C. White notes, in *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg's idea is also philosophical. She writes: "On the basis of the documentary evidence from Schoenberg's library, it seems that it is primarily through Schopenhauer that Schoenberg became preoccupied with this concept of Idea (*Gedanke*, Platonic *Idee*, or, as in Schopenhauer, *Vorstellung*), and its Representation (*Darstellung*)" (White 70). According to White, Kant and Schopenhauer were the two most prominent philosophers in Schoenberg's library, alongside Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Aristotle, Plato (68), and literary figures like George, Dehmel, Rilke, Strindberg, and Balzac (55-57 and 64-65). Indeed, in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Schopenhauer had described music as existing in a direct parallel with his notion of "Ideas," as an objectification of the "will," and this would have been quite influential for Schoenberg:

Die Musik ist nämlich eine so unmittelbare Objektivation und Abbild des ganzen Willens, wie die Welt selbst es ist, ja wie die Ideen es sind, deren vervielfältigte Erscheinung die Welt der einzelnen Dinge ausmacht. Die Musik ist also keineswegs, gleich den andern Künsten, das Abbild der Ideen; sondern Abbild des Willens selbst, dessen Objektität auch die Ideen sind: deshalb eben ist die Wirkung der Musik so sehr viel mächtiger und eindringlicher als die der andern Künste: denn diese reden nur vom Schatten, sie aber vom Wesen. Da es nun doch derselbe Wille ist, der sich sowohl in den Ideen, als in der Musik, nur in jedem von beiden auf ganz verschiedene Weise, objektiviert; so muß, zwar durchaus keine unmittelbare Aehnlichkeit, aber doch ein Parallelismus, eine Analogie seyn zwischen der Musik und zwischen den Ideen, deren

Erscheinung in der Vielheit und Unvollkommenheit die sichtbare Welt ist

(Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke* v. 1 304).²⁶⁸

For Schopenhauer here, music is the most elevated art since it exists in an unmediated (*unmittelbare*)²⁶⁹ relationship with the will, whereas the other arts only exist in a mimetic relation to the images manifested by its Ideas: the other arts, such as painting, are thus images of images. Music, on the other hand, functions as “a parallel” or “an analogy” to the Ideas *themselves*, the direct manifestations of Schopenhauer’s transcendental principle of the will (and it should be remembered that while this principle of the will functions for Schopenhauer as the basis for instinctual drives, it is not a purely psychological force, but rather a cosmological inner reality of the world in general—which is therefore significantly different from and in many ways opposed to the will of the individual). To the degree that he would have been influenced by Schopenhauer, then, Schoenberg’s notion of the musical idea can also be read as a transcendental principle and not simply as an aesthetic category. And, as others have noted (cf. Wörner 24), Schoenberg also sometimes figured this metaphysical conception of the musical idea in terms of a Swedenborgian mysticism:

[...] *the unity of musical space demands an absolute and unitary perception*. In this space, as in Swedenborg’s heaven (described in Balzac’s *Seraphita*) there is no absolute down, no right or left, forward or backward. Every musical configuration, every

²⁶⁸ “Music is as direct an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas, whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself. Since, however, it is the same will which objectifies itself both in the Ideas and in music, though in quite different ways, there must be, not indeed a direct likeness, but yet a parallel, an analogy, between music and the Ideas whose manifestation in multiplicity and incompleteness is the visible world” (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* 336).

²⁶⁹ This is one of the words that Schoenberg’s Moses uses to describe God at the outset of *Moses und Aron*.

movement of tones has to be comprehended primarily as a mutual relation of sounds, of oscillatory vibrations, appearing at different places and times” (SI 223).

The musical idea would be thus laid out across a unitary and synchronic space²⁷⁰ analogous to a kind of cosmological logic, whether of Schopenhauer’s will or Swedenborg’s heaven.

For this reason, then, when Schoenberg writes about *expression*, it will be only very rarely the consciously or intentionally determined expression of a subject’s interior state. Instead, his notion of expression is much more often guided by the disavowal of one’s subjective consciousness²⁷¹ in favor of either a principle of *divine inspiration* (à la Swedenborg) or an *unconscious or instinctual drive* (à la Schopenhauer’s *Wille* or even the Freudian *Es*²⁷²). Furthermore, while the language of unconscious drives tends to appear more often in Schoenberg’s earlier writings, and while the thought of the divine tends to occur more often in his later work, the two should not be seen as mutually exclusive: in fact, Schoenberg often seems to conflate the two in ways that will become especially relevant to *Moses und Aron*. In this regard, consider the following five quotations, spanning a period from 1911 to 1947:

1. *From 1941:*

In fact, the concept of creator and creation should be formed in harmony with the Divine Model; inspiration and perfection, wish and fulfilment, will and

²⁷⁰ Schoenberg writes, emphatically, “THE TWO-OR-MORE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE IN WHICH MUSICAL IDEAS ARE PRESENTED IS A UNIT” (SI 220).

²⁷¹ Certainly there are seeming exceptions to this tendency to deny the subject. In *Metaphysical Song*, for instance, Gary Tomlinson identifies what he calls “Schoenberg’s unwillingness to relinquish post-Enlightenment or, more specifically, Hegelian subjective powers of expression” (152). For Tomlinson, however, *Moses und Aron* comes to complicate these “subjective powers:” “If theological is glimpsed, insofar as it can be, in the [opera’s] composing out of the row, Schoenberg’s most basic compositional impulses pitted his own claims to subjective power and autonomy against the mechanism he had set in motion” (153).

²⁷² In his early expressionist years, for example, Schoenberg was explicitly interested in depicting an unconscious impulse in his art, which Lewis Wickes and Alexander Carpenter—as well as Seth Brodsky and Adrian Daub more recently—each explore in relation to psychoanalysis, in their respective essays on Schoenberg’s 1909 monodrama, *Erwartung*. The libretto for *Erwartung* was written by Marie Pappenheim, a psychiatrist related to Bertha Pappenheim, better known as Anna O. in Freud and Breuer’s *Studies on Hysteria*. More potential relationships between Schoenberg and psychoanalysis will be discussed below, through Lyotard.

accomplishment coincide spontaneously and simultaneously. In Divine Creation there were no details to be carried out later; 'There was Light' at once and in its ultimate perfection (SI 215).

2. *From 1947:*

Again: it does not matter whether an artist attains his highest achievements consciously, according to a preconceived plan, or subconsciously, by stepping blindfolded from one feature to the next. Has the Lord granted to a thinker a brain of unusual power? Or did the Lord silently assist him now and then with a bit of His own thinking? (SI 429).

3. *From 1911:*

Ich entscheide beim Komponieren nur durch das Gefühl, durch das Formgefühl. Dieses sagt mir, was ich schreiben muß, alles andere ist ausgeschlossen. Jeder Akkord, den ich hinsetze, entspricht einem Zwang; einem Zwang meines Ausdrucksbedürfnisses, vielleicht aber auch dem Zwang einer unerbittlichen, aber unbewußten Logik in der harmonischen Konstruktion (*Harmonielehre* 502).²⁷³

4. *From 1911:*

Das Schaffen des Künstlers ist triebhaft. Das Bewußtsein hat wenig Einfluß darauf. [...] Er ist nur der Ausführende eines ihm verborgenen Willens, des Instinkts, des Unbewußten in ihm. Ob es neu oder alt, gut oder schlecht, schön

²⁷³ In composing I make decisions only according to feeling, according to the feeling for form. This it is that tells me what I must write, everything else excluded. Every chord I put down corresponds to a necessity, to a necessity of my urge to expression; perhaps, however, also to the necessity of an inexorable but unconscious logic in the harmonic structure (Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* 417).

oder häßlich ist, er weiß es nicht. Er fühlt nur den Trieb, dem er gehorchen muß
(*Harmonielehre* 500).²⁷⁴

5. *From 1947:*

An artist need not think very much, if only he thinks correctly and straightforwardly. He feels that he obeys the urge of a spring within himself, the urge to express himself, just like a clock [...]. The artist's response to the urge of his motor occurs automatically without delay, like that of every well-lubricated mechanism (SI 400).²⁷⁵

For Schoenberg, then, the aim of musical composition would be to express an ultimately divine or unconscious idea. And yet, the impossibility of ever achieving this expression is taken up as the central subject of one of his most famous works—the opera *Moses und Aron*.

3. *Moses und Aron*

On July 2nd, 1951, a scene from the second act of *Moses und Aron*, the “Dance round the Golden Calf,” was performed for the first time in Darmstadt, Germany. Schoenberg would die less than two weeks later, having never heard his opera staged, or even performed in full. Of course, he would also never see it performed in its entirety due to the fact that he never finished

²⁷⁴ “The artist's creative activity is instinctive. Consciousness has little influence on it. [...] He is merely the instrument of a will hidden from him, of instinct, of his unconscious. Whether it is new or old, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, he does not know. He feels only the instinctual compulsion, which he must obey” (Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony* 416).

²⁷⁵ Much could be said about these five quotations, and others like them spread across Schoenberg's writings. One might, for instance, consider them to be on some level similar to Rameau's *instinct pour la musique* or the Pythagorean *musica universalis*, as each describe an instinctual relationship with a kind of natural cosmological logic (with, of course, the significant caveat that Schoenberg's notion of this divine instinct would need to be unshackled from precisely those harmonies and ratios that these theories claim as their very premises). But on the other hand, one might equally highlight in these passages Schoenberg's hyper-Romanticism—namely, the emphasis he places on an irrational and excessive natural or mystical will, veiled behind appearance, which any sufficiently sublime work of art would somehow reveal. But what would be perhaps most interesting would be to follow how Schoenberg seems to harbor both of these predispositions *simultaneously* (Romantic unconsciousness and Baroque mechanism), emphasizing one or the other to suit his arguments.

writing it. He claimed many times to be on the verge of finishing it, though he never did: he even once applied for a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to do so, though it was denied in 1945 (Rosen 1). Schoenberg wrote the music for the two acts that he did finish simultaneously alongside the opera's libretto, mainly between the years of 1930 and 1932. The text for the first scene of the third act was also written, though the first two acts are usually performed without it, and are usually considered to form a whole by themselves.

Moses und Aron has at least three precursors in Schoenberg's work: the (also unfinished) oratorio from 1917 *Die Jakobsleiter* (*Jacob's Ladder*),²⁷⁶ his 1927 Zionist agitprop play *Der biblische Weg*, and early drafts of the opera as an oratorio, which Schoenberg conceived while writing *Der biblische Weg* between 1926 and 1927 (White 20). The opera's concerns are also shared by earlier texts, such as the *Four Orchestral Songs*, op. 22, from 1915, three of which set poems from Rilke's *Das Stunden-Buch*, for soprano. The following lines are particularly prefigurative of *Moses's* position:

Alle, welche dich suchen, versuchen dich.

Und die, so dich finden, binden chich

An Bild und Gebärde (124).²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ In a letter to Richard Dehmel, dated 13 December 1912, Schoenberg wrote: "Nämlich: ich will seit langem ein Oratorium schreiben, das also Inhalt haben sollte: wie der Mensch von heute, der durch den Materialismus, Sozialismus, Anarchie durchgegangen ist, der Atheist war, aber sich doch ein Restchen alten Glaubens bewahrt hat (in Form von Aberglauben), wie dieser modern Mensch mit Gott streitet (siehe auch: „Jakob ringt“ von Strindberg) und schließlich dazu gelangt, Gott zu finden und religiös zu werden. Beten zu lernen! [...] Und vor allem: die Sprachweise, die Denkweise, die Ausdruckweise des Menschen von heute sollte es sein; die Probleme, die uns bedrängen, sollte es behandeln" (Schoenberg, *Briefe* 31) ["For a long time I have been wanting to write an oratorio on the following subject: modern man, having passed through materialism, socialism, and anarchy and, despite having been an atheist, still having in him some residue of ancient faith (in the form of superstition), wrestles with God (see also Strindberg's 'Jacob Wrestling') and finally succeeds in finding God and becoming religious. Learning to pray! [...] And above all: the mode of speech, the mode of thought, the mode of expression, should be that of modern man; the problems treated should be those that harass us" (Schoenberg, *Letters* 35)]. This oratorio refers to *Die Jakobsleiter*, but could easily also refer to *Moses und Aron*.

²⁷⁷ Annmarie S. Kidder translates these lines as "All who seek you put you to the test. / And those who find you tie you / to an image and an act" (Rilke, 125).

From a similar perspective as Rilke here, *Moses und Aron* explores the Talmudic prohibition on graven images, but by retelling parts of the story of *Exodus*.

Act 1, scene 1 portrays God calling Moses through the burning bush, charging him with liberating and uniting the people of Israel. Moses protests that he cannot accomplish this task, since he “kann denken, / aber nicht reden [can think, / but not speak]” (“Libretto” 38). Presumably in order to emphasize this inability to speak, Moses’s role (to be performed, in Schoenberg’s words, by a “deep, very powerful voice” (*Eulenburg X*)) is written, with one exception, entirely as *Sprechstimme*, a technique with which Schoenberg had already experimented as early as 1912, with *Pierrot Lunaire*. God replies to Moses’s protestations that his brother Aron (a tenor) will act as his “mouth:” “Aus ihm soll deine Stimme sprechen, / wie aus dir die meine!” (“Libretto” 40).²⁷⁸ God’s word—his voice (*Stimme*), the opera’s *vox Dei*—will be thus mediated thrice over: 1. from God through Moses, 2. from Moses through Aron, and 3. from Aron to the people (*das Volk*).

In scene 2, Moses meets Aron in “der Wüste [the wasteland]” to explain God’s plan to him. The two sing a number together, in which Moses’s slow, bellowing *Sprechstimme* proclaims the gravity and difficulty of their task—which starkly contrasts with Aron’s heavily melodized singing, in which he glorifies God while at the same time doubting him. In scene 3, Moses and Aron set out to deliver God’s message to the people of Israel, who are portrayed as scattered, fickle, volatile, and pagan. The scene takes place as a conversation of the people amongst themselves, about Moses and Aron and their new god, whom they would add to their pantheon. In scene 4, Moses delivers his message of God to the people—but mediated by way of Aron, who translates Moses’s words into (sung) images that will be more palatable to the people. The people at first refuse this new god because he cannot be seen, and almost grow violent. But

²⁷⁸ “From him will your own voice then issue, / as from you comes my voice” (“Libretto” 40).

then Aron takes Moses's staff and performs the biblical miracle, turning it into a serpent and back again, after which he turns Moses's hand leprous and heals it again.²⁷⁹ The people are amazed, and give in to this new god's power: they desire to "Erschlagt die Fronvögte! [...] Erschlagt ihre Priester! [...] Zerschlagt ihre Götter!" ("Libretto" 74).²⁸⁰ After this, Moses, Aron, and the people set off together into the desert, where Aron promises them that God will take care of them and ultimately lead them to the promised land.

Act 2, scene 1 begins with seventy elders (about twenty-five of whom sing) and a priest, complaining to Aron that Moses has been gone for too long (on Mount Sinai), and that they can wait no longer to receive his law and command (*Recht und Gesetz*) ("Libretto" 82). Aron tries to calm them by way of argument:

Wenn Moses von dieser Höhe herniedersteigt, / wo ihm allein das Gesetz sich offenbart, /
soll mein Mund euch Recht und Gesetz vermitteln. / Erwartet die Form nicht vor dem
Gedanken! / Aber gleichzeitig wird sie da sein! (ibid.).²⁸¹

But the people reject his arguments and grow more and more agitated. By scene 2 they are enraged, surrounding Aron and the Elders and threatening to kill them all ("Libretto" 84-86). Lacking Moses's law, chaos threatens to erupt—and so, reluctantly, in order to calm the growing mob, Aron returns the old gods to their people. He commands them to give him all their gold, which he uses to forge the golden calf. Night thus falls in scene 3 upon a drunken orgy and animal and human sacrifice, portrayed through a series of four *divertissements*: "Tanz der Schlachter," "Orgie der Trunkenheit und des Tanzes," "Orgie der Vernichtung und des

²⁷⁹ Here, of course, is a departure from the Bible, in which Moses performs the miracles himself.

²⁸⁰ "kill the taskmasters!... kill all their priesthood!...Destroy all their idols!" ("Libretto" 74).

²⁸¹ "When Moses has left the summit, come down from there, / from where the laws are revealed to him alone, / you shall hear both law and command from my mouth, / You cannot expect form before idea, / for together they'll make their appearance" ("Libretto" 82).

Selbstmordes,” and “Erotische Orgie” (“Libretto” 92-106).²⁸² This activity culminates in the sacrifice of four naked virgins, and rampant suicide among the crowd, followed by the survivors stripping naked and shouting, “[e]urem Vorbild, Götter, / leben wir die Liebe nach!” and “Heilig ist die Lust!” (“Libretto” 104),²⁸³ before eventually leaving the stage or falling asleep.

Scene 4 depicts Moses’s return from the mountain with the Tables of the Law, and his deposition of the golden calf. Here there is another departure from the biblical narrative: in the opera, Moses simply makes the calf vanish, whereas in *Exodus* he physically destroys the idol and mixes its ashes with river water, which he makes the people drink. This punishment implies that the people shall never be rid of the calf, and with it the tendency to create false images—a sentiment with which Schoenberg would have nevertheless agreed. Finally, in scene 5, Aron attempts to philosophically defend his actions in the face of a furious Moses. Aron argues that Moses’s tablets are themselves also images, at which point Moses smashes them. The biblical pillars of fire and cloud then appear, which Aron claims will lead the people out of “the wasteland,” and everyone rejoices—but Moses renounces them as images as well, and exclaims his failure in the famous final words of the second act, falling to the ground and crying out:

Unvorstellbarer Gott! / Unaussprechlicher, vieldeutiger Gedanke! / Läßt du diese
Auslegung zu? / Darf Aron, mein Mund, dieses Bild machen? / So habe ich mir ein Bild
gemacht, falsch, / wie ein Bild nur sein kann! / So bin ich geschlagen! / So war alles
Wahnsinn, was ich gedacht habe, / Und kann und darf nicht gesagt werden! / O Wort, du
Wort, das mir fehlt! (“Libretto” 120).²⁸⁴

²⁸² “Dance of the Butchers,” “Orgy of Drunkenness and Dancing,” “Orgy of Destruction and Suicide,” and “Erotic Orgy.”

²⁸³ “In your godly image / we shall let our passions live. / [...] Holy is desire!” (“Libretto” 104).

²⁸⁴ “Inconceivable God! / Inexpressible, many-sided idea, / will you let it be so explained? / Shall Aaron, my mouth, / fashion this image? / Then I have fashioned an image too, false, / as an image must be. / Thus am I defeated! / Thus, all was but madness that I believed before, / and can and must not be given voice. / O word, thou word, that

Here “Unvorstellbarer Gott” recalls the very first words of the opera: “Einziger, ewiger, allgegenwärtiger, unsichtbarer und unvorstellbarer Gott” (“Libretto” 36).²⁸⁵ This phrase, a version of which Schoenberg had already employed in *Der biblische Weg* (318), appears in various forms throughout *Moses und Aron*, reminding its listener of the opera’s impossible project of representing the unrepresentable. However, although these words are the first that Moses speak-sings, they are not the first *utterance* of the opera, which actually begins with the voice of God, singing the vowel “O” from offstage.

God is represented in the opera by six solo voices, one of each voice type (soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, bass). The higher three voices (doubled by flute, English horn, and clarinet) sing two chords over the space of three crotchets each, and the three lower voices enter by singing very similar chords beginning at measure 2, overlapping with the higher voices for two beats:

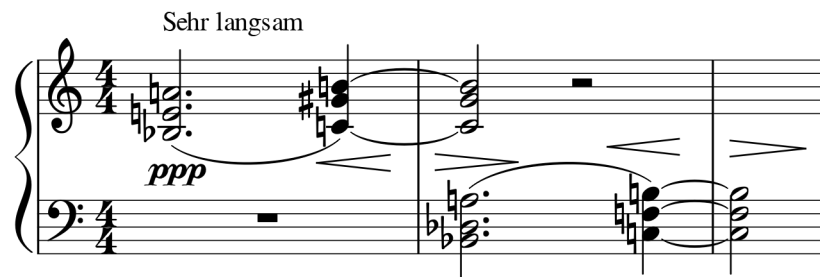


Figure 4. Opening Chords of *Moses und Aron* (cf. Wörner 55, White 117, Simpson 29)

I lack!" ("Libretto" 120). This is where the opera almost always ends. In the unfinished third act, however, Aron has been taken prisoner for committing a crime against God, and he and Moses continue their debate. Ultimately, Moses has to decide Aron's fate, and decides to let him go free, so that he might live, if he can: "Gebt ihn frei, und wenn er es vermag, / so lebe er [Set him free, and if he can, he shall live]" ("Libretto" 130). Immediately after being set free, however, Aron dies. One might see here a metaphor in which Aron would need his chains (images) in order to live: setting the subject completely free from its chains (of signifiers) would undo it. Act 3 is also an important subject of Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of *Moses und Aron* in *Musica Ficta*, in which he discusses a sublime silence found in this usually unperformed text, for which no music was written.

²⁸⁵ "Only one, infinite, thou omnipresent one, unperceived and inconceivable God...!" ("Libretto" 36).

In his very early book on *Moses und Aron*, Karl Wörner notes a radical symmetry in these two groups (Wörner, 55): four chords played across eight crotchets using eight distinct tones.

Furthermore, as Wörner observes, the first chord of the first group and the last chord played by the second group are intervallically identical, both made up of a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth (*ibid.*). Considered horizontally rather than vertically, the intervals between the notes of each chord are also symmetrical: a major second, major third, and major second, respectively (1-2-1, in whole tones). Rhythmically also, each set of voices sounds for four beats independently and two beats with all voices simultaneously (4-2-4). In his study of the opera, Wörner goes on to show how these sets of chords never return in this pure symmetrical relationship throughout the entirety of the opera—and how, when they do recur, it is always in distorted or corrupted form (55-56).

The vowel “O” that the six voices sing also occupies an important position, part of the way between speech and unintelligible sound, between the semic and the asemic, between exclamation and lament. Michael Cherlin describes the function of this “O” similarly to how Wörner understands the function of the opening chords, in that it works as the symbol of a plenitude that Moses cannot quite approximate:

As it turns out the entire list of attributes [*einzigster, ewiger*, etc.] is unified by a musical structure that refers back to the opening “O” and hints ahead to the problem of language that will plague Moses through the opera. / The musical setting stresses the first vowel of each Attribute. The accented vowels form a progression that gradually moves from a relatively “high, front” vowel toward a “low, back” one, precisely toward the open vowel “O” that had been sung by the Divine Voice: *Einzigster, ewiger, allgegenwärtige*[r], *unsichtbarer, und unvorstellbarer Gott!* / The vowel progression moves chord by chord

through the complete series [see below], and falters, at thrice *un*, before reaching the last word, *Gott*. The Divine name, *Gott*, restates the “O” vowel, but with a crucial difference. Now “O” is conditioned and bounded by strong consonants. Thus the open unbounded “o” is not uttered by Moses. The Voice from the Bush and the 6 Solo Voices enter simultaneously with Moses’ word *Gott*. They restate the original harmony, and now sing and speak with *words* (Cherlin, qtd. in Cherlin 283).

After Moses proves himself unable to recreate the primal Rousseauian vociferation of the opening “O,” the divine apostrophe, God *appears* to him in the form of the burning bush. Here the original six voices still sing, but they are now accompanied by another group of Sprechstimme voices called the “Stimme aus dem Dornbusch.” Moses thus first recognizes God in the opera as only an image of the divine voice, speaking to him in human language. In other words, before this point in the opera—from mm. 1 to 18—there is still a radical separation between God and Moses. But from measure 19 onward, Moses’s task has already failed in its beginning. God responds to this failure by translating his voice into a language that Moses can understand—but then what Moses takes to be immediate will have been already mediated and thus (by Moses’s own logic) misrecognized.

Nevertheless, one might argue that Moses is placed structurally closer to God’s open “O” syllable than the other characters are, by way of the role’s Sprechstimme, which Moses shares with the *Stimme aus dem Dornbusch*. Here Schoenberg seeks to displace the aesthetic predominance of pitch (see above), by using Moses’s voice to figure sound as continuous, rather than as a discrete set of tonal divisions—which might be *themselves* understood to be images. The description of Moses’s speaking role in the “Dramatis Personae” of *Moses und Aron* is as follows:

Moses:

Sprecher

(tiefe, sehr große Stimme); ist nur in geschlossenen Stücken an Takt und Rhythmus gebunden; sonst zeigen die Fermaten an, wie weit er Freiheit hat. Aber das Tempo ist durch die Musik gegeben. Die Tonhöhenunterschiede sollen die Deklamation nur charakterisieren (Eulenburg X).²⁸⁶

Much like in Rousseau, then, declamation takes precedence over pitch, which is expected only to color a seemingly more free use of the voice in Moses's Sprechstimme.²⁸⁷ In terms of its dramatic effects, Schoenberg's deployment of this vocal technique seems to emphasize Moses's inarticulate nature, and perhaps also his closeness to an idea of God's voice that cannot be expressed in traditional song. Indeed, the only time in the opera that Moses breaks away from his Sprechstimme in order to fully sing is in act 1, scene 2, when he sings the following line:

“Reinige dein Denken, / lös es von Wertlosem, / weihe es Wahrem” (“Libretto” 46).²⁸⁸ Until this point in the scene, Aron has been singing the praises of God, but has also been questioning his unrepresentability: “Nie wird Liebe ermüden, sich's vorzubilden” (“Libretto” 44)²⁸⁹—“Volk, auserwählt dem Einzigem, kannst du lieben, was du dir nicht vorstellen darfst?” (“Libretto”

²⁸⁶ “Moses:

Speaker

(deep, very powerful voice); only bound to beat and rhythm in set pieces, otherwise the fermatas indicate to what extent he is free. The tempo however is set by the music. The differences in pitch should only give character to the declamation” (Eulenburg X).

²⁸⁷ Though Schoenberg had already successfully employed Sprechstimme in *Pierrot Lunaire*, the technique itself actually predates any of his uses of it, stretching back to at least the nineteenth century—or perhaps even back to Homer, depending on one's definition (see Chapter 1). Aiden Soder (2) argues that Schoenberg's Sprechstimme in particular takes its origins from Engelbert Humperdink's 1897 melodrama, *Königskinder*; however, in *A History of Opera* (489–490), Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker show that the term also had an older and more complicated history, emerging at an intersection between nineteenth-century writings on Wagner, Verdi, and Weber, the genre of the *Melodram* in general—which dates back to the eighteenth century and, interestingly, to Rousseau's *Pygmalion*—and early-twentieth-century acting techniques borrowed from spoken drama, in which “actors often half sang their lines” (Abbate and Parker 490): “They were intoning, using actual pitched notes, getting the throb in the voice that way” (ibid.). It would therefore be somewhat inaccurate to characterize Moses's Sprechstimme only as another subversion of tonality, since the technique also derives from several dramatic and operatic traditions.

²⁸⁸ “Purify your thinking. / Free it from worthless things. / Let it be righteous” (“Libretto” 46).

²⁸⁹ “Love will surely not weary of image forming” (“Libretto 44)

44).²⁹⁰ At this point, Moses briefly addresses Aron in song in order to communicate with him in a way that he will understand—just as, in the first scene of the opera, unbeknownst to Moses, God also deigned to address him in language after he had failed to recognize the divine voice. Thus again, as the plot bears out, there is another misrecognition, another *stumble* in the communication of the idea, this time no longer from God to humanity, but from brother to brother. And in this sense, Moses's Sprechstimme does more than simply illustrate his ineloquence: it also functions as a device for inscribing the opera's central predicament into the mechanism of the conflict between Moses and Aron, onto the very surface of their conflicting voices.

4. Mosaic Tables

While it is true that, on a certain level, the musical doubling of an opera's action is not uncommon, and is in fact almost a requirement, throughout the history of opera,²⁹¹ the music in *Moses und Aron* does not simply accompany or reinforce its plot; it instead performs and struggles with the same problems of representation that the libretto describes—and in some ways it even takes on a primary role in outlining the opera's central philosophical problematic. In this sense, several musicologists have already rigorously catalogued and analyzed how, in Schoenberg's opera, the music takes on quasi-signifying functions, as in Wörner's discussion (above) of the unrecovered symmetry of the opera's initial chord (cf. also analyses by White, Lewin, Cherlin, and Boss, for example). Here, however, I will be interested less in how *Moses und Aron* successfully represents the problems of expression that it takes as its theme, so much as

²⁹⁰ "Folk chosen by the only one, can you worship what you dare not even conceive?" (ibid.).

²⁹¹ In other words, all sufficiently complex operas will use the repetition and transformation of musical themes and motifs (and leitmotifs) to foreshadow, reveal, complicate, or even contradict their characters' desires, plans, and ideas, as the characters present and enact them.

how these problems necessarily corrupt the expression of Schoenberg's own *idea*—first on the level of language, but then, and more thoroughly, on the level of music. This is to say that the opera's music would meet its language in a chiasmus of the mutual failures of their capacities for expression (or, as Lyotard will later call them below, their *silences*). Some of corruptions that take place on the level of the opera's language and narrative have been described above, and can be summarized in Moses's final exclamation, "O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt!"²⁹² Musically, however, this question now demands a further investigation of the manner in which the opera was composed—namely, the method that is commonly called serial, dodecaphonic, or twelve-tone composition.

Schoenberg himself insisted on avoiding the suggestion of any namable method altogether, more directly calling this technique "composition with twelve tones which are related only with one another" (SI 218). He had initially developed this serial composition throughout the early 1920s (Rosen 73)—beginning with op. 23 no. 5, op. 24 ("Serenade") and op. 25 ("Suite for Piano")—in an attempt to respond to the problems of chromatic "saturation" in his earlier free atonal music that Rosen described. In other words, this technique can be seen (though somewhat reductively) to have been derived from a need for a formal substitute for tonal development and resolution, in order to be able to write long-form compositions like those that had been written on the basis of tonal structures. As Schoenberg put it, "[f]ormerly the harmony [of traditional tonality] had served not only as a source of beauty, but, more important, as a means of distinguishing the features of the form [of a work]" (SI 217). Serialism, then, in some sense responded to a need to more concretely establish the "comprehensibility" (ibid.) of a work's form, so that a composer might be able write music with longer and more complex

²⁹² One might note that it is only here, at the end, paradoxically and accidentally, that Moses exclaims the opera's initial "O."

structures—such as the multi-act *Moses und Aron*, as opposed to shorter monodramas like *Erwartung*, for instance. However, if Schoenberg was driven to invent a system in order to make his music more comprehensible, he also did so with an explicit suspicion of the limitations of the impulse to systematize:

Whether one calls oneself conservative or revolutionary, whether one composes in a conventional or progressive manner, whether one tries to imitate old styles or is destined to express new ideas—whether one is a good composer or not—*one must be convinced of the infallibility of one's own fantasy* and one must believe in one's own inspiration.

Nevertheless, the desire for a conscious control of the new means and forms will arise in every artist's mind; and he will wish to know *consciously* the laws and rules which govern the forms which he has conceived 'as in a dream' (SI 218; emphasis added).

In this first sustained theoretical discussion of his method (originally delivered as a lecture at UCLA in 1941 and published in *Style and Idea* in 1950), Schoenberg half-jokingly identifies the origin of his system as a “fantasy,” and describes the origins of its form to have been “conceived ‘as in a dream.’” This latter formulation does not say that Schoenberg’s method was conceived “in a dream,” but only “*as* in a dream”—as in, that is to say, a system figured around the *unconscious*. Once again, then, Schoenberg privileges a notion of unconscious inspiration over the application of any method or technique. Consider also this frequently-quoted excerpt from a letter Schoenberg wrote in 1932 to Rudolf Kolisch, with regard to Kolisch’s analysis of his third string quartet:

Die Reihe meines Streichquartetts hast Du richtig [...] herausgefunden. Das muß ein sehr große Mühe gewesen sein, und ich glaube nicht, daß ich die Geduld dazu aufbrächte. Glaubst Du denn, daß man einen Nutzen davon hat, wenn man das weiß? Ich kann es mir

nicht recht vorstellen. [...] Ich kann nicht oft genug davor warnen, diese Analysen zu überschätzen, da sie ja doch nur zu dem führen, was ich immer bekämpft habe: zur Erkenntnis, wie es *gemacht* ist; während ich immer erkennen geholfen habe was es *ist*! Ich habe das dem Wiesengrund schon wiederholt begreiflich zu machen versucht, und auch dem Berg und dem Webern. Aber sie glauben mir das nicht. Ich kann es nicht oft genug sagen: meine Werke sind Zwölfeton-Kompositionen, nicht Zwölfeton-Kompositionen [...] (*Briefe* 178-179).²⁹³

Schoenberg insists that one should not place too much emphasis on the analysis of his compositions: to understand their structure is, to some degree, to misunderstand them, since their structure only enacts an idiosyncratic “figurability” (to use a Freudian term) of an unconscious or even divine idea that underlies them. Yet, bearing this caveat in mind, Schoenberg’s technique will merit some explanation here.

Twelve-tone composition begins with what is called the “series,” or the “tone row,” or, in Schoenberg’s formulation, the “basic set” (SI 219). This series can be tentatively defined as an arrangement of all twelve tones of the chromatic scale according to the composer’s idea—after which, “the associations of tones into harmonies and their successions [throughout the composition] is regulated [...] by the order of these tones” (*ibid.*). The series, then, gives an initial distribution of twelve notes and eleven intervals that can be used to structure the harmonic

²⁹³ “You have rightly worked out the series in my string quartet [...]. You must have gone to a great deal of trouble, and I don’t think I’d have had the patience to do it. But do you think one’s any better off for knowing it? I can’t quite see it that way. [...] I can’t utter too many warnings against overrating these analyses, since after all they only lead to what I have always been dead against: seeing how it is done; whereas I have always helped people to see: what it is! I have repeatedly tried to make Wiesengrund [Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno] understand this, and also Berg and Webern. But they won’t believe me. I can’t say it often enough: my works are twelve-note *compositions*, not *twelve-note* compositions [...]” (*Letters* 164-165).

and melodic²⁹⁴ relationships of a particular composition, acting much like a key would in tonal harmony. The series for *Moses und Aron* is:



Figure 5. Prime series for *Moses und Aron*

A series is subject to what Rosen calls Schoenberg's "principle of nonredundancy" (83), which means that its order is fixed, and that theoretically a pitch class cannot be repeated out of order until the series has been worked through in its entirety (though notes can be repeated if they are repeated consecutively). However, because it is really the order of the intervals and not of the notes themselves that is supposed to be preserved, the manner in which a series can be transformed is actually quite variable. It can be divided, or "partitioned"—usually in dyads, trichords, tetrachords, and hexachords—and voiced either horizontally in melodies or vertically in chords (often split between different singers and groups of instruments). It can also be transposed up or down any number of pitches (as long as the intervals remain the same). And, finally, it can be permuted through one of three additional forms, which alone produce 48 variants of the series as a whole. These three forms are the *inversion* (in which the series's intervals are inverted), the *retrograde* (in which the series is played back to front), and the *retrograde inversion* (the combination of the previous two). A series is therefore usually labeled P (prime), I (inversion), R (retrograde), or RI (retrograde inversion), with the number of pitches (in semitones) that it has been transposed up the staff written after it: for instance, in the

²⁹⁴ Reich writes that "Schoenberg often emphasised that his musical inspiration is mostly melodic in nature—that is to say, it appears in the horizontal—and that the harmonies then formed are vertical condensations of these melodic lines. This kind of inspiration also explains the 'emancipation of the dissonance'—which at that time [around 1909] was becoming ever more apparent—since on the horizontal plane there is, after all, no such thing as a dissonant clash" (48).

“traditional method” of labelling a series, the retrograde of the series transposed up 5 half steps would be notated as R5. But there are also other ways to notate and analyze the series, for example by using what is generally called an “absolute pitch matrix,” in which the row that begins on C is always marked as P0 (Johnson 31-32). This method has the benefit of relativizing any supposedly original series (like that given in Figure 5), and thus allowing the analyst to concentrate more directly on the transformations of a work’s intervallic relationships themselves. In her study of *Moses und Aron*, following David Lewin’s approach (“*Moses und Aron*: Some General Remarks, and Analytic Notes for Act I, Scene I”), White begins with a traditional method but then notates the inverted series beginning on C as I0 (which would be traditionally be labelled I3) in order to highlight one final aspect of Schoenberg’s serialism—its “combinatoriality.”

Coined by the American composer Milton Babbitt,²⁹⁵ this term names a compositional structure that Schoenberg began using in his later compositions (including *Moses und Aron*), initially according to which two hexachords from different permutations of the series each use a group of six *distinct* notes, such that together they use all twelve tones consecutively (and when this occurs, the two combinatorial hexachords are said to form an “aggregate”).²⁹⁶ Figure 6 illustrates a hexachordally combinatorial relationship between the two rows P0 and I3 (which White labels as I0):

²⁹⁵ See Arnold Whittall’s *Serialism (Cambridge Introductions to Music)* (245, fn. 8), as well as *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt*.

²⁹⁶ *Moses und Aron*’s combinatoriality is typically hexachordal, though there are also other forms of combinatoriality, which use groupings other than the hexachord.

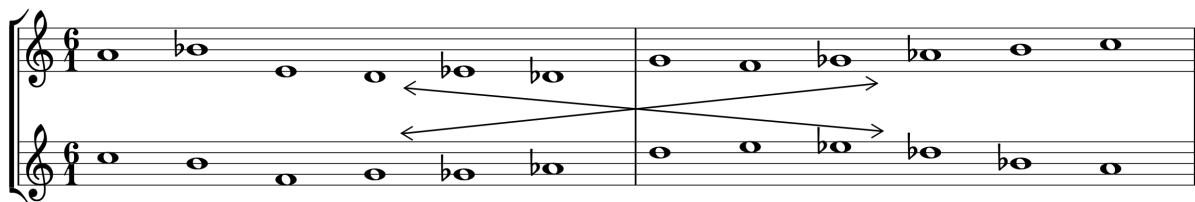


Figure 6. Hexachordal Combinatoriality between P0 (top) and I3 (bottom) in *Moses und Aron*²⁹⁷

White, then, in order to highlight this aspect of the opera, labels I3 as I0 “because the central semicombinatorial relationship of the opera [...] is between the prime row on pitch A and the retrograde inversion row on pitch A. This RI form becomes ‘RI0,’ and its retrograde then becomes ‘I0’” (White 112). This shift allows her to set up a table that displays each of the series’s 48 variants while also foregrounding their hexachordal combinatoriality:

I

	9	10	4	2	3	1	7	5	6	8	11	0	
0	A	B \flat	E	D	E \flat	C \sharp	G	F	F \sharp	G \sharp	B	C	0
11	G \sharp	A	E \flat	C \sharp	D	C	F \sharp	E	F	G	B \flat	B	11
5	D	E \flat	A	G	G \sharp	F \sharp	C	B \flat	B	C \sharp	E	F	5
7	E	F	B	A	B \flat	G \sharp	D	C	C \sharp	E \flat	F \sharp	G	7
6	E \flat	E	B \flat	G \flat	A	G	C \sharp	B	C	D	F	F \sharp	6
P 8	F	F \sharp	C	B \flat	B	A	E \flat	C \sharp	D	E	G	G \sharp	8 R
2	B	C	F \sharp	E	F	E \flat	A	G	G \sharp	B \flat	C \sharp	D	2
4	C \sharp	D	G \sharp	F \sharp	G	F	B	A	B \flat	C	E \flat	E	4
3	C	C \sharp	G	F	F \sharp	E	B \flat	G \sharp	A	B	D	E \flat	3
1	B \flat	B	F	E \flat	E	D	G \sharp	F \sharp	G	A	C	C \sharp	1
10	G	G \sharp	D	C	C \sharp	B	F	E \flat	E	F \sharp	A	B \flat	10
9	F \sharp	G	C \sharp	B	C	B \flat	E	D	E \flat	F	G \sharp	A	9
	9	10	4	2	3	1	7	5	6	8	11	0	

RI

Figure 7. Lewin/White Matrix for *Moses und Aron* (cf. White 114, Lewin 4, Johnson 35)

²⁹⁷ Here arrows indicate equivalent groups of notes: the first hexachord of P0, in other words, uses the same tones as the second hexachord of I3, and vice versa. Therefore, the two first hexachords of each row, taken together—and the second two hexachords of each row, taken together—would be combinatorial with one another, since each uses six different notes.

The opera's combinatorial relationships can be read here according to the formula $Px \Leftrightarrow Ix$, where the first hexachord of any prime series (P) will have a combinatorial relationship with the first hexachord of its corresponding inversion (I). This is also to say that the first hexachord of any prime series will contain the same set of pitch classes as the *second* hexachord of its inversion, or the first of its retrograde inversion (RI).²⁹⁸ White (115-129) then goes on to show, following Lewin, how Schoenberg uses this combinatoriality to perform a kind of pseudo-modulation between rows, in a way that resembles how “a Tonal composer might use keys” (Lewin, qtd. in White 118). Using all of these twelve-tone compositional methods (partitions, permutations, and combinatoriality), Schoenberg is able to develop all of the complex structures in the score of *Moses und Aron* from a single set of twelve tones, “related only with one another” (SI 218; cited above).

The (prime) series itself might be thus seen to act as a sort of *causa sui*, providing a distillation of the pattern through which the opera's music generates itself. Along these lines, Wörner even describes *Moses und Aron*'s series as

the symbol of divine, spiritual order. For Schoenberg, it is a means to an end, as the series itself *remains, as it were, silent*. It is, however, an all-embracing note-constellation in which the total conception of the opera, as though it were pure idea, is contained, enveloped and encompassed (95-96; emphasis added).

And yet, the series itself is only a “means to an end” (ibid.): this end is the “*absolute and unitary perception of musical space*” (SI 225; cited above) generated through it. In other words, while each iteration of the series may “appear separate and independent to the eye and the ear, they reveal their true meaning only through their co-operation, even as no single word alone can express a thought without relation to other words” (Schoenberg, SI 220). In this sense, any single

²⁹⁸ White thus writes this relationship as “PX=RIX” (118).

iteration of the series could only ever form a part of the work's larger order, which exists only through the totality of the relationships arranged through its partitioning, permutation, and combination. The series *as such*, therefore, in Wörner's words, "remains, as it were, silent" (95-96) within the work, and only metonymically gestures toward the *idea* of the work as a whole, which is what counts for Schoenberg.

The idea of Schoenberg's work is, in other words, not representable by any of the particular configurations of its series, and in this sense Schoenberg again goes on to describe his idea as necessarily unconscious. In a letter he wrote to Alban Berg while composing *Moses und Aron*, in which he makes recourse to his earlier psychological language to describe this aspect of the opera, Schoenberg writes:

Aber ich habe doch den Vorteil davon, daß ich dann ganz fertig bin, wenn ich die letzte Note komponiert haben werde. Nur Eines fürchte ich: ich werde dann alles vergessen haben, was ich geschrieben habe. Denn schon jetzt erkenne ich kaum wieder, was ich voriges Jahr davon komponiert habe. Und wäre nicht *eine Art unbewußten Gedächtnisses* im Spiel, das mich unwillkürlich, musikalisch und textlich immer wieder in die rechten Denkgeleise zurückführt, so verstünde ich nicht, wie das Ganze dann organischen Zusammenhang haben soll... (qtd. in Reich, *Arnold Schönberg* 186; emphasis added).²⁹⁹

Moses und Aron's structure only coheres, in Schoenberg's words, according to a kind of "unconscious memory;" each iteration of its series would therefore only amount to a kind of association produced in relation to this unconscious memory. Each would be therefore only an *image* of Schoenberg's "divine, spiritual order" (Wörner 95-96) that itself remains silent,

²⁹⁹ "I'll have finished the whole job when I've composed the last note. There's only one thing I'm afraid of: that by then I'll have forgotten everything I've written. For even now I can scarcely recognize the parts of it I composed last year. And if it weren't for *a kind of unconscious memory* that always automatically brings me back to the right track of ideas, both musically and with the words, I wouldn't know how the whole thing should come to hang together at all [...]" (qtd. in Reich, *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography* 179; emphasis added).

unconscious, and fundamentally inaccessible—even to him. Wörner seems to indicate as much (101) when he points to the fact that Aron’s first words to Moses in the opera, in mm. 124-145, explicitly move through all four permutational forms consecutively—P4, I4, R4, RI4 (as they are labelled above in Figure 7). There, Aron sings the first six notes of both P4 and I4, forming an aggregate, and then sings R4 and RI4 in their entirety. In his first appearance, then, Aron, who in the plot of *Moses und Aron* allegorizes the tendency to create false images, cycles through the four major ways in which the series can be presented, thus further suggesting that the series itself acts as a sort of image. Or, rather, to put it more provocatively, it would act as *both* the unseen prime mover of the opera *and* its golden calf, each of its iterations acting as a pagan totemic sacrifice to the opera’s divine and unconscious logic. In this sense, one might begin to see how Schoenberg’s idea cannot exist anywhere *outside of* his work:³⁰⁰ its idea, in other words, would be radically inseparable from the “working through” of the work itself, and any single one of its ideal structures would be at best only a false image of it.³⁰¹ In his famous essay on *Moses und Aron*, “Sakrales Fragment: Über Schönbergs *Moses und Aron*,” Adorno more generally identifies this contradiction:

Bereitet der Text das theologische Ärgernis, von dem Einen Gott als dem Gedanken zu reden, dann wiederholt sich dies Skandalon, unkenntlich fast geworden durch die *künstlerische Gewalt*, inmitten der musikalischen Komplexion. Das Absolute, auf das

³⁰⁰ In this regard, the usage of so-called “absolute pitch matrices” (Johnson 32) already highlight this theoretical observation, inasmuch as they relativize the supposedly original tone row and allow the analyst to focus on the twelve-tone work’s intervallic relationships rather than on the permutations of a single row.

³⁰¹ *Durcharbeitung*—the “perlaboration” or “working-through”—of Freudian psychoanalysis begins from an analysand’s tendency to repeat an unconscious affect (through transference) as a form of resistance during analysis, in order to avoid remembering and confronting an unconscious and often traumatic memory: “the patient repeats instead of remembering” (Freud, “Remembering Repeating and Working-Through” 151). It is the analyst’s job, through a succession of interpretations, to help the patient to “work through” these repetitions, overcoming their resistances in order to ultimately arrive at what has been repressed, which is nonetheless present already within the transference (see also: “Working-Through,” in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*). Similarly, Schoenberg’s work can be seen to “work through” its individual rows (see below).

diese Musik ohne Erschleichung hinaus will, ist sie als ihr eigener Gedanke, selber das, was die Fabel am letzten möchte, Bild des Bilderlosen (457-458; emphasis added).³⁰²

Each iteration of the series within the opera thus almost paratactically presents an always-insufficient *image* of its idea. But, further, because these images can exist only in a state of perpetual self-reference and permutation, they can only be images of themselves—of, that is to say, of other images—and therefore (voices) of *nothing*, ultimately producing only empty, tautological, and almost automatic repetition. The opera's *causa sui* thus falls into infinite regression. It becomes a kind of condensation and displacement of itself (to borrow Freud's language), in a fractal repetition of images without referent.³⁰³

The poignant manner in which the opera ends seems to echo precisely this failure of its form in the face of the economy of representation that Schoenberg and Moses demand. There, in act 2, scene 5, after his argument with Aron, Moses realizes that his idea cannot exist apart from his word: “So habe ich mir ein Bild gemacht, falsch, / wie ein Bild nur sein kann! [Then I have fashioned an image too, false, / as an image must be]” (“Libretto” 120). He therefore renounces

³⁰² “If the text creates the theological scandal of speaking of the one God as the idea [*Gedanken*], then this is a scandal that is duplicated in the texture of the music, though rendered almost unrecognizable by the power of the art. The absolute which this music sets out to make real, without any sleight of hand, it achieves as its own idea of itself: it is itself an image of something without images—the very last thing the story wanted” (Adorno, “Sacred Fragment” 229).

³⁰³ Here one might be tempted to draw a parallel with the “reference without referent” in Mallarmé's poetry that Derrida describes in “La double séance.” Rosen also gestures toward a comparison of Schoenberg with Mallarmé, specifically analogizing a supposed breakdown of tonality that occurs in Schoenberg with a supposed breakdown in meaning in Mallarmé: “If an individual work of music may alter and even create ‘language,’ then the conditions for understanding it must—at least partially—be made evident in the work itself. The process of establishing the conditions for this intelligibility is as important in Mozart as in Schoenberg. But it is less visible in Mozart, whose work seems to refer to a stable outside system. Each composer, too, both establishes the structure of that system and, in many cases, transcends it by an extraordinarily free play with the elements of music. This free play is easily to be found in Schoenberg, but the explicit reference to an exterior and relatively stable system of meanings has almost vanished. To speak of the ‘breakdown of tonality’ in this connection is to beg the question, as we can see if we look at a similar late-nineteenth-century development in literature. The free play of meaning is also as essential to Montaigne as to Mallarmé—the association of ideas through connotation, etymology, assonance, and rhyme; it is less in evidence in Montaigne because there it is accompanied by a submission to a stable system of discourse that Mallarmé refused to accept. Yet we cannot speak of the breakdown of a linguistic system with Mallarmé, or the decline of French. The ‘breakdown of tonality’ is similarly a fiction” (19-20).

his idea, decrying it as madness and lamenting his inability to communicate: “So war alles Wahnsinn, was ich gedacht habe, / und kann und darf nicht gesagt werden! [Thus, all was but madness that I believed before, / and can and must not be given voice]” (ibid.). It was all a kind of *Wahnsinn*—neither *Wahn* nor *Sinn* but a madness between delusion and meaning, in the profusion of language and image without a semantically stable point of reference. Moses thus cries out in anguish, “O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt!” (ibid.): the word fails him, and causes him to fail, since it is irreconcilable with the immediate (*unmittelbar*) economy of representation that he demands—or, more precisely, since this economy reveals itself to be in fact predicated upon, and therefore always already corrupted by, the word or the image that it wants to circumvent. In this moment, Moses even addresses language as subject (*du*), which is to say as an entity outside of his control, as what exceeds the meaning for which he would use it as a mere vehicle of communication, control, or law.

Such an asymmetry is paralleled at the level of the music as well. Immediately before Moses sings these final words, the first and second violins play a last iteration of the series, a retrograde inversion beginning on E \flat (RI6 in Figure 7). As Jack Boss has pointed out (391–394), here Schoenberg partitions the row into two uncharacteristically asymmetrical groups of 5+7 notes, some of which repeat within each group: as Boss argues (391), these repetitions might be read as a musical illustration of Moses’s famous “heaviness of speech” (*Exodus* 4:10).³⁰⁴ After this, at the end, the violins play the final F \sharp of the series RI6 for three and a half bars, over which Moses pronounces his last line. Then, finally, in the last measure of the opera, after Moses has fallen silent, the violins are joined by the violas and cellos, also on F \sharp , for a final swell in their dynamics, *p* to *f* to *pp*, which perhaps gestures toward a musical response to Moses’s

³⁰⁴ Alternatively translated as “heavy of mouth,” “heavy of tongue,” or “slow of speech and slow of tongue.” See Tigay, Shell, and the NRSV Bible.

lament, but one that, *also* unable to speak the language of the idea, instead fades into silence. This musical faltering and asymmetry at the end of the opera thus suggests an irreconcilability that repeats what was dramatized by the libretto. In other words, the narrative of the opera does not present an impasse endemic only to linguistic expression that its music would somehow remedy in its Romantic immediacy: rather, the music redoubles this problem, repeating itself again and again in different permutations, stumbling in the articulation of its idea and finally ending in a tragic and emphatically asymmetrical presentation that provides no formal closure. One might, of course, argue that this disunity is part and parcel of the fact that the opera was never finished, and this would certainly not be wrong. However, one might also argue, along with Lacoue-Labarthe, that the opera was never finished, over a period of twenty years, precisely because of this irreconcilability—or “césure” (Lacoue-Labarthe, *Musica Ficta* 250-264)—at the heart of its form.

Yet, despite the aporetic structure of the opera, its failed quest for a pure musical form still maintained an importance for Schoenberg. For instance, in an almost Hanslickian manner, he made statements such as:

The assumption that a piece of music must summon up images of one sort or another, and that if these are absent the piece of music has not been understood or is worthless, is as widespread as only the false and banal can be (SI 141).

Many have used claims like this one as evidence that Schoenberg had portrayed himself in the character of Moses. Yet, in a letter to Joseph Rufer on 13 June, 1951, exactly one month before his death, Schoenberg denied that his Mosaic opera presented anything having to do with himself as an artist. Referencing an article in which the “contrast between Moses (as the spiritual principle) and Aaron (representing matter, with its limitations) is compared to the artistic

conception of a work and its realisation in the given artistic medium” (Schoenberg, Letters 288, fn. 1), Schoenberg wrote to Rufer that he found this idea to be “[z]um Teil unsinnig; nämlich den Künstler hineinzuziehen. Das ist Ende des 19ten Jahrhunderts, aber nicht ich. Der Stoff [of *Moses und Aron*] und seine Behandlung sind rein religions-philosophisch” (*Briefe* 298).³⁰⁵ This is not necessarily to say that one should take Schoenberg at his word: there are indeed definite parallels to be drawn between these two figures. However, the language that Schoenberg uses here might serve to clarify such a comparison: “Der Stoff *und seine Behandlung* sind rein religions-philosophisch” (emphasis added). The *treatment* (*Behandlung*) of the subject matter—its musical as well as its linguistic treatment—is “religious-philosophical.” It is not the case, therefore, that Schoenberg simply allegorizes himself as a tragic figure whose idea is misunderstood by the public, but rather that he attempts to treat a philosophical problem of expression that neither music nor language can solve. As George Steiner put it, *Moses und Aron* “belongs to that group of works produced in the twentieth century, and crucial to our present aesthetics, which have their own possibility as essential theme” (131). This is true, as I have been arguing here, at multiple levels: the literary-aesthetic-metaphysico-religious problem of the opera is also inscribed into its music.

It is strange, then, when some commentators have hastened to isolate the opera’s music from these theoretical concerns, as if trying to shelter a notion of absolute music from the non-musical, as if attempting to keep the “idea” of music pure and unexposed to the mire of literary, philosophical, or even moral-political forms of representational corruption. For instance, Wörner claims,

³⁰⁵ “Partly nonsensical; in that it brings the artist in. That’s late-19th-century stuff, but not me. The subject matter and the treatment of it are purely of a religious-philosophical kind” (*Letters* 288).

The critical-literary approach to Schoenberg's poem [*Moses und Aron*] misses its point, as does any attempt to evaluate Schoenberg's other texts in terms of literature (40).

Or Rosen:

The libretto, written by Schoenberg himself, cannot be taken seriously as literature, but its power of inspiring and reinforcing the music is undeniable (94).

These claims, however, are not exactly borne out by the fact that this opera has become a consistent object of literary and philosophical study over many years: consider for instance the work of Adorno, Lacoue-Labarthe, Steiner, Erickson, and Albright, among others. The last three sections of this chapter will take a final detour through another such thinker, Jean-François Lyotard, who used psychoanalysis as a model through which to examine the relationship between music, language, and the Schoenbergian unconscious in *Moses und Aron*.

5. Inaudible

Schoenberg appears in Lyotard's writing from the early 1970s through the mid-1990s. In the early essays that appear in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, for instance, Lyotard often appears to be critical of Schoenberg's compositions, preferring instead the aleatory music of John Cage and others. But by the time that Schoenberg appears in *Le Différend*, Lyotard will have situated him in relationship to Cézanne and Joyce, as an artist "faisant la guerre entre genres de discours" (§218). And then, by 1996, in "Musique et postmodernité," a Schoenbergian serialism finally appears (with Pierre Boulez) *alongside* the music of Cage, rather than as strictly opposed to it. In this late essay, Lyotard claims that Schoenberg's music inaugurated the paradoxical tendency in

modern music to “rendre à l’écoute la puissance de se prêter à *l’inaudible*” (“Musique et postmodernité” 10-11; emphasis added).³⁰⁶

For Lyotard, such an inaudibility does not imply the absence of sound, but rather its material qualities that often go unheard by traditional patterns of listening. In another late essay, “Musique mutique,” he similarly describes an inaudible “matière sonore... [qui] habite, clandestin, le matériau audible” (*Misère de la philosophie* 196).³⁰⁷ And again, in “Musique et postmodernité,” he writes of a “secret immanent à la forme qui la transcende. Il y a dans l’oeuvre un reste qui défie la réception ou la perception ordinaire et qui défiera le commentaire” (“Musique et postmodernité” 11-12). Yet if these essays describe a “secret” or “clandestine” aspect of sound that subtends the experience of listening, this is not the same as nostalgically claiming that music might be somehow heard *immediately*, that a “true” listening or music itself might occur outside of the mediations of a history, a discourse, a rhetoric, or a set of forms that give it shape, meaning, content, context, etc. In Lyotard’s words, to “deconstruct” hearing along these lines “ne signifie nullement revenir à un état naturel de l’écoute que la culture musicale aurait fait perdre” (*L’inhumain* 189). Instead of any “état naturel de l’écoute,” then, Lyotard’s notion of the inaudible only describes a renewed attention to those aspects of sound that are generally eschewed by composition and conventional forms of listening³⁰⁸ internalized by the

³⁰⁶ “Cette extension de l’audible a été inaugurée de façon systématique dans la musique par le sérialisme de Vienne” (9-10). Although Lyotard discusses serialism in this essay almost exclusively through the figure of Boulez, this subtle reference first indicates a recognition on Lyotard’s part that what he identifies in Boulez’s serialism is already at work in Schoenberg.

³⁰⁷ “Il y a une matière sonore qui n’est pas ce que le musicien nomme le matériau. Celui-ci est le timbre du son, il s’entend. La matière ne s’entend pas [Lyotard will say this of the death drive in “Plusieurs silences” below], elle est la douleur d’être affectée. Cette douleur gémit, inarticulée, elle ne demande rien. L’affection est la menace d’être abandonné et perdu. Le souffle de la plainte, qui est la matière sonore, habite, clandestin, le matériau audible, le timbre” (“Musique mutique” 230).

³⁰⁸ Again, in this regard one might consider the discussions of listening in Waltham-Smith, *Music and Belonging Between Revolution and Restoration*.

subject,³⁰⁹ such as tonal and rhythmic imperfections, timbral variations, ambient noise, interruptions, etc. In short, then, what is inaudible for Lyotard is the nuance of the musical “event.”³¹⁰

In “Dieu et la marionnette,” another essay collected in *L’inhumain*, Lyotard describes this nuance in terms of a “matière non formalisée,” which

Échappe aux synthèses, celles de l’appréhension comme de la reproduction, qui assurent normalement la saisie de la matière sensible à des fins de plaisir, par les formes, ou de connaissance, par les schèmes et les concepts. S’il n’y a pas de sujet pour rapporter à soi, c’est-à-dire à ses pouvoirs de synthèse, les formes sensibles et les opérateurs conceptuels, —pour leur rapporter *cette* nuance, c’est que la matière sonore qui *est* cette nuance n’est là qu’autant que, là et alors, le sujet n’y est pas (*L’inhumain* 168-169).

The sonic event thus remains unsynthesized and unsynthesizable by the subject, and that is why it is inaudible. It is what would remain consciously unaddressed by the listening subject;³¹¹ and,

³⁰⁹ David Bennett describes this movement between form in music and an inaudible or secret materiality that inhabits and exceeds it: “Liberating sound from form means emptying it of meaning or use-value, so that it no longer speaks to or for a subject; without address or destination, it becomes mere ‘sonorous matter’, and as such what Lyotard calls ‘inhuman’. In so far as our ears are culturally programmed to filter mere ‘sonorous matter’ out of our perceptions of music (just as sound engineers filtered out the ‘glitches’ of audio-technology from music, before the practitioners of ‘noise art’ and ‘glitch music’ turned these accidental by-products into yet another medium of composition and ‘expression’), then to be forced to sense this meaningless ‘sonorous matter’ is to be given an intimation of the limits of our own hearing and musical appreciation. Lyotard describes this as a sense of the ‘inaudible within the ‘audible’” (*The Lyotard Dictionary* 148).

³¹⁰ Here is Anthony Gritten’s description of Lyotard’s conception of the “event” in an article in *The Lyotard Dictionary*: “In general, an event is an occurrence beyond the powers of representation, something that the subject experiences but which he or she is unable to comprehend or think through adequately, let alone phrase coherently” (71). Lyotard himself also uses the term “occurrence” in *Le Différend*, as a translation of Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis*—describing the event as an “Il y a”, or a “There is” (*Es gibt*) of experience—which Lyotard then juxtaposes with the “presentation” of experience in a phrase or genre of discourse (*Le Différend* 114-115). But Lyotard’s theorization of the event also stretches back to his early work in *Discours, Figure*, in which he describes its mechanics in terms of phenomenology and psychoanalytical notions of trauma and *Nachträglichkeit*: “Quand nous disons : ce qui arrive est arrivé, le système temporel nous autorise à entendre : Il y a une cause, il y a un trauma initial, c’est un effet de récurrence d’un événement passé ;—et cela suffit à refouler l’événement, puisqu’un événement passé est un non-evenement” (*Discours, Figure* 155). Certainly these notions of “event” and “occurrence” can and should be brought to bear on Lyotard’s writing on music, since music is in some ways the art of the event par excellence. For more on the event, and how it relates to Lyotard’s work in general, see Geoffrey Bennington’s *Lyotard: Writing the Event*.

in this sense, Lyotard's notion of the inaudible (*l'inaudible*) also suggests a relationship with the unconscious (*l'inconscient*).³¹² As will be discussed below, this relationship between (un)consciousness and (in)audibility will be typified in Lyotard's reading of *Moses und Aron*.

In general, Schoenberg and the serialists (especially Boulez) pursued this unconscious and "inaudible" quality of music through what Lyotard called their "over-articulation" of its structures: for the serialists, "l'on doit *sur-articuler* toutes les composantes du langage musical pour lui arracher sa matière-son inaudible" ("Musique et postmodernité" 12-13; emphasis added). In other words, serialist composition would over-articulate its series, repeating and transforming it through its different permutations, twisting them around an unconscious idea that cannot be expressed directly. And, just as in the free association of psychoanalysis—when the analysand over-articulates their language and the analyst no longer listens for semantic or narrative coherence—the over-articulation of the serialists' musical structures would also relativize any content supposedly lying behind them, thus demanding another kind of listening, which listens only on the *surface* of what it hears. But if Lyotard makes this claim in the 1990s, he had already identified an even more robust critique of musical "depth" in Schoenberg already

³¹¹ Lyotard characterizes the central aporia of modern music as its attempt to "adresser ce qui n'est pas adressé" ("Musique et postmodernité" 15-16)

³¹² Especially considered in light of the language of address that Lyotard deploys in "Musique et postmodernité" (15-16), this characterization of the inaudible seems to have much in common with Lyotard's understanding of *affect*. Although the question of affect appears and reappears throughout Lyotard's oeuvre, he makes a more explicit attempt to theorize it later in his career, in the wake of the "philosophy of phrases" outlined in *Le Différend*. For Lyotard, a phrase "articulates" itself in what he calls a "universe," which is composed of an addresser, an addressee, a meaning, and a referent. Affect, or what he calls the "phrase-affect," can be said to exist only to the degree that it eschews these four requirements of the articulate phrase. For Lyotard, affect is therefore radically "inarticulate," which is to say that it is a kind of phrase that can never enter into discursive language. For this reason, Lyotard recognizes in affect a kind of silence and a "wrong" along the lines of what he outlines in *Le Différend*. In this sense, affect can even be said to be prototypical of his notion of the differend; indeed, one of his more important essays on affect ("La phrase-affect : d'un supplément au Différend") was initially subtitled "le différend même." Within the context of Lyotard's writing on music, his theorization of affect most prominently appears in his late essay, "Musique mutique"—but it can be found in various forms throughout almost all of his essays on music. For more on Lyotard's concept of affect in general, see "La phrase-affect : d'un supplément au Différend" and "Emma" in *Misère de la philosophie*, as well as "Voix" in *Lectures d'enfance*; see also Claire Nouvet's "The Inarticulate Affect" and Geoffrey Bennington's "Childish Things" in *Minima Memoria*, as well as the essays in *Traversals of Affect*.

in 1972, at the beginning of his most important essay on the composer, entitled “Plusieurs silences.”

6. Depthless

In “Plusieurs silences,” Lyotard describes the structures of music, or music itself, as a “dispositif:” “Ce qu’on appelle musique est un dispositif” (DP 272). Lyotard takes this notion in part from classical rhetoric, from the *dispositio* (organization or arrangement) that he defines in *Discours, Figure* simply as a “question de la forme” (149). As Stuart Sim explains, Lyotard tends to use this term

in the sense of an organising principle (or ‘set-up’) that gives some kind of structure or order to actions and events, a disposition towards interpreting these according to a particular scheme of thought—or at the very least a space, or framework, in which actions and events can be played out (*The Lyotard Dictionary* 55).

Describing music *qua* dispositif in this way, then, Lyotard enumerates some of its principal organizational characteristics.³¹³ For instance, music is a dispositif

3° qui ne produit de sons que discontinus et dont les hauteurs sont repérables au ½ ton près sur une partition fixe de l’espace sonore ;

4° qui accord la primauté au mode d’ut, traite cinq demi-tons sur douze en notes subalternes, « de passage » ;

5° qui sous le nom de tonalité ne tolère comme distribution des intervalles entre les sons que celle donnée par le mode « pythagoricien » ;

³¹³ Lyotard lists seven characteristics in total, the first two of which I have omitted for the sake of expediency: #2 discusses the use of instruments, and #1, probably the most interesting characteristic that Lyotard lists here, describes how music serves as a “commutateur d’énergie libidinale en énergie audible, et l’inverse” (DP 272). What Lyotard might mean by this commutation will be explored in the next and final section of this chapter.

6° qui privilégie sous le nom d'accords des agrégats de trois degrés séparés respectivement par des intervalles de tierces ;

7° qui dans le mode d'ut donne la prééminence aux accords majeurs dits parfaits placés sur les 1^{er}, 4^e, et 5^e degrés (DP 273).

These characteristics—which more or less correspond to what Schoenberg calls “tonality,”³¹⁴ and which therefore determine the conditions for distinguishing between consonance and dissonance—serve to establish what Lyotard calls musical “depth” (*profondeur*) and musical “appearance” (*apparence*): “Le couple dissonance-résolution est une bonne introduction à la question de l'*apparence* en musique : parce qu'il est constitutif de la *profondeur*” (DP 274). Here Lyotard describes “appearance” in music as “un dispositif théâtral analogue au *fort-da*” (DP 275)—a departure and return not of a toy but of tonal resolution. As with Lacoue-Labarthe's concept of *musica ficta*, then, music *as such* is for Lyotard always already theatrical.³¹⁵ And this theatrical *fort-da* of music, this coupling of departure and return—away from the tonic and back again—by means of which (tonal) music becomes inherently theatrical,³¹⁶ is made possible through what Lyotard then calls music's depth, its *profondeur*:

Si j'étais un savant musicologue, j'oserais écrire ceci : on peut déterminer l'*effet de profondeur* (constitutif de la théâtralité) à partir de la hiérarchie de sonorités en musique classique. Si par exemple il y a résolution d'une dissonance dans l'accord de tonique,

³¹⁴ By identifying music through this notion of a dispositif, however, and not just discussing “tonality,” Lyotard is able to engage with the manner in which music functions in relation to other kinds of dispositifs (such as psychoanalysis), in a way that allows him to locate it within a larger “libidinal economy.”

³¹⁵ In discussing Mallarmé's criticisms of Wagner, Lacoue-Labarthe writes: “Ce n'est pas la musique en elle-même—encore moins la musique « en soi »—qui est en cause. C'est la musique en tant qu'elle vient soutenir le dispositif théâtral et assurer, par là même, ce que le théâtre s'est toujours proposé comme fin : la participation ou la communion. La déconstruction du *Gesamtkunstwerk* procède de cette intuition, non pas que la musique se prête au théâtre, mais qu'elle est, par elle-même, déjà théâtrale, c'est-à-dire productrice—à sa manière—de *fiction*” (*Musica Ficta* 128-129).

³¹⁶ Lyotard describes music's “théâtralité” as “la congruence profonde de la musique et du spectacle en Occident « classique », à la prééminence de l'opéra, à la possibilité que le cinéma ait été inventé. Sans parler du politique” (*ibid.*).

c'est que l'oreille-mémoire, quand elle entend l'accord dissonant ou l'accord de dominance anticipe le chemin à suivre à travers l'espace sonore pour arriver au but. « Profondeur » suppose qu'on est à la fois ici et là-bas. Et si elle peut déjà y être, c'est qu'elle connaît le chemin qui y mène (cadence). C'est ainsi que le temps est dominé (ibid.).

Depth is thus produced by the domination of time in the musical dispositif, such that a listener is able to comprehend and anticipate the conditions for the resolution of a work (from dominant to tonic, for example), and is thus, in a sense, in two places at once. In "Plusieurs silences," Lyotard argues that Schoenberg's achievement was to have radically undermined this notion of depth, and subsequently the theatricality of music, by way of his serialist compositional practice. Thus referencing Adorno, Lyotard writes that

Schoenberg veut détruire l'apparence, dit très bien Adorno ; exode de Schoenberg loin de l'Égypte musicale, de la modulation continue wagnérienne, de l'expressionnisme, de la *musica ficta*, en direction du désert, de la pauvreté volontaire des moyens (DP 284).³¹⁷

Furthermore, for Lyotard, this critique of depth and appearance in Schoenberg's music disrupts traditional (theatrical) forms of listening, in a way that perhaps makes Lyotard's Schoenberg rather different from the composer's usual portrayal as a champion of "structural listening." Instead, Schoenberg would attempt to altogether "*cesser de faire marcher l'oreille*" (ibid.), to prevent it from listening for depth, by way of a music that would no longer be governed by the *fort-da* game imposed upon it by external hierarchies. From this lack of depth, from this broken ear, then, Lyotard implies that an echo of what he later calls the "inaudible" in music might be heard.

³¹⁷ For more on the catachrestic usage of the term "*musica ficta*," in Adorno and then Lacoue-Labarthe, see Eric Prieto's "Musical Imprints and Mimetic Echoes in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe."

But Schoenberg also knew, perhaps more so in 1930 than in 1909, that there is no immediate truth of sound veiled *behind* its appearance, that to present music as immediate is still to make it *appear* immediate, in the depth of an expectation (*Erwartung*). Therefore, rather than attempting to circumvent the dispositif of music in favor of its immediacy—and thus falling into the snares of Romanticism (which perhaps his earlier Expressionism does do, to some extent)—Lyotard argues that Schoenberg’s later serialist works develop and *over-articulate* the dispositif of music such that they render it hollow and *without depth*, unable to establish any hierarchy from which to depart and return. Rather than creating musical depth, then, serialist music instead only consistently *repeats itself* (see Section 4 above), as in God’s immemorial response to Moses in *Exodus* 3:14, “I am that I am”—repetition of subject as predicate and predicate as subject, double articulation of the verb “to be” that voids its idea of ontological stability, thus confronting its listener with a kind of silence written into the name. It gives way to what might be called a *tautontology* of expression.

7. *Vox Clamantis*

In “Plusieurs silences,” Lyotard explores what I have just called Schoenberg’s “tautontology” by way of a complicated discussion of *Moses und Aron*, and two “silences” that occur within it at the intersection of psychoanalysis and music.

The first “silence” that Lyotard discusses in this essay is that of the death drive, which “ne s’entend jamais, silencieuse, dit Freud” (DP 269). In the Freudian model, the primary processes of the unconscious are “bound” by secondary processes that “sectionnerait l’énergétique en *articuli* et en écarts réguliers” (DP 269), investing it in ends beneficial to the organism. On the other hand, the Freudian “death drive” names a principle of entropy (or as

Freud sometimes calls it, the “nirvana principle”) according to which this bound energy naturally tends toward dissolution. For Freud, in other words, as the “life drives” bind and articulate one’s libido, directing it toward specific and beneficial ends, the death drive works silently against them, unconsciously fostering destructive behavior, usually under the guise of pleasure (and thus “silently”). Lyotard therefore writes that “[l]a pulsion de mort est simplement le fait que l’énergie *n’a pas d’oreille pour l’unité*, pour le concert de l’organisme (de « l’appareil psychique »), est sourde à sa composition [...]” (ibid.). He then goes on to explore how the musical dispositif organizes sound at the material level (see above), how it binds sound to form (in “articuli”), analogizing this sonic binding with the psychoanalytic process of binding (*Bindung* or *liason*): Lyotard thus writes that “un son est un bruit lié” (DP 270). Schoenberg and the twentieth-century avant-garde would have in this sense introduced the death drive into composition, as what silently began to “unbind” or “unwork” the structures and strictures of music.

Lyotard’s second silence is that of serialism’s “absolute musical space,” which Schoenberg analogizes with the plenitude and eternity of Swedenborg’s heaven (SI 223; cited above). It is the silence of order given by Schoenberg’s *idea*, which Lyotard compares to what Lacan calls the “symbolic” order. Lyotard’s concern in his discussion of Schoenberg in “Plusieurs silences” is thus to follow the ways in which these two silences—the silence of the unconscious death drive in music (of music unbound, thus of noise) and the silence of Schoenberg’s musico-metaphysical order—interpenetrate one another in *Moses und Aron*, both on the level of its music and on the level of its narrative. In short, here Lyotard argues that *Moses und Aron* is supposed to move “[d]u silence du bruit, pluriel, au silence de l’ordre” (DP 278). But, of course, such a unidirectional movement necessarily fails, since the one silence will have always been contaminated by the other from the beginning.

In (early Freudian) psychoanalysis, as Lyotard explains, these dual and dueling silences are encapsulated by the figures of “the hysteric” and the analyst:

Le silence de l’analyste *doit* mettre fin (?) au silence de l’hystérique. [...] Les mots que l’hystérique adresse à l’analyste véhiculent la rumeur des affects, ils rencontrent le silence du docteur, grâce auquel ils vont venir se distribuer dans le « pur » silence de la *ratio*, celui qui sépare les unités distinctives (phonèmes) et permet de reconnaître le signifiant langagier et de communiquer. [...] [L]e fantôme-fantasme qui l’enchaînait sera révoqué, le vrai Dieu, *Logos*, l’emportera (DP 282).

According to this reading, analysis would perform the commutation of one silence into another. The analyst would “put an end to” the hysteric’s silence, ending it by giving it an end, a *telos*, situating it within the silent theatre of a phallic discourse, which would finally “allow” the hysteric’s noise to appear as comprehensible speech. Lyotard argues that such a relationship also appears, by analogy, in multiple ways throughout *Moses und Aron*. In the opera, as Lyotard puts it, “[l]’hystérique est le peuple d’Israël, qui désire des signes (des réponses) et des idoles, et qui danse et chante autour du Veau d’or” (ibid.). Schoenberg portrays “the people” as constantly craving the noise and ecstasy of their old pagan images—poised on the precipice of a sort of mass hysteria that ultimately erupts in the opera’s second act, in an orgy of sex and death (see above)—while, opposed to this pagan and hysterical death drive, Moses would advocate for the silence of the unpronounceable tetragrammaton, the symbol of a perfect order (“I am that I am”) that would regulate and contain the people’s disarray. In a rather complicated formulation, then, Lyotard writes,

Non pas les mots d’Aron ou Moïse, mais le silence *de* Jahvé = le silence qu’il observe (pas de réponse), et le silence qu’il fait observer (imprononçable). Dans ce dispositif

l'analyste est le commutateur (lui-même silencieux) d'un silence dans l'autre, comme Moïse. Le Sprechgesang est transit du silence mélodique passionnel en silence systématique, combinatoire ; ce transit se soutient du silence du père (DP 283).

Here Lyotard himself vacillates between the silences of analysis and the silences that he identifies in the story of *Exodus*. The absolute, self-referential silence of Yahweh would be legislated by Moses, who, like the analyst, attempts to reinscribe the disorder of the people's passion into its law. And, as Lyotard's critical gloss on Moses's Sprechstimme would indicate, this commutation occurs not merely at the level of the opera's narrative, but also at the level of its music. Such a relation between psychoanalytic theory, religion, and music, might be tentatively expressed in a triple analogy:

"Hysteric" or Unconscious Affectivity	Paganism	Sound
Analyst	Moses	Composer
The Symbolic/Law of the father	Monotheism/Law of the Father	Music

Figure 8. Lyotard's Psychoanalysis-Religion-Music Analogy in "Plusieurs silences"
(Columns express relata while rows express relation.)

If Schoenberg at various points in his career theorized his compositional practice as both the site of a certain unconscious and as an imitation of divine order, then Lyotard sees Schoenberg's music (and particularly *Moses und Aron*) as the surface upon which he works through the relation between these topoi and their several silences: the silence through which the unconscious and the symbolic contaminate one another, or the silence that monotheism imposes on pagan hysteria, or the silence that noise and order inflict upon one other—as well as the

chiasmi that Lyotard sees operating between them, whereby one silence inevitably contaminates and corrupts the other.

With this in mind, Lyotard describes Schoenberg's serialist opera by fusing all of these multiple language games, in a passage that defies being read according to any single one of them:

[...] il n'y aura pas d'histoire, de l'épiphanie salutaire, il y a un langage sans intention, qui exige, qui exige non pas religion, mais foi. Schoenberg critique la musique comme *récit* édifiant, il veut en faire un *discours*, produit par une langue qui est un système arbitraire, mais développé dans toutes ses conséquences (langue de Jahvé), et ainsi toujours éprouvé comme irrecevable et tragique: quelque chose comme l'inconscient selon Lacan? Une nouvelle transcendance est introduite dans le matériau sonore, toute familiarité devient impossible, le tragique l'emporte, comme chez Freud. Ce qui est recherché avec la « technique » dodécaphonique et sérielle comme avec la « technique » analytique, c'est le tragique, c'est-à-dire ce qui, aux yeux de Freud comme de Schoenberg, fait entièrement défaut au positivisme scientifique ou musical du XIX^e siècle. Le tragique est l'intensité hors signification, mais rapportée à l'intention d'un Autre (DP 284-285).

This dense description of Schoenberg's religious-psychoanalytic-musical “discourse” characterizes it as the search for a totalized musical language that would result in the absolute fulfillment of its idea, the absolute emancipation and transmutation of dissonance from noise into order. However, in the same breath, Lyotard also recognizes that the fulfillment of this musical “discourse”—as a “*discours*, produit par une langue qui est un système arbitraire, mais développé dans toutes ses conséquences,” or as the “langue de Jahvé”—is ultimately impossible, as this chapter has been discussing. Schoenberg's will to expression ends as failure and

tragedy³¹⁸ (“O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt!”): his opera is “irrecevable et tragique” precisely because its music is *governed by an idea that subverts the very conditions through which this idea might be expressed*. Perpetually falling short of expression, then, Schoenberg’s serialism instead repeats and permutes itself, and thus in a way “works through” the structures of its music, over-articulating them in different ways, again and again.³¹⁹ Such a stammering of the series, its perpetual repetition at the level of the musical dispositif, no longer *expresses* Schoenberg’s unconscious or divine idea, but only inscribes it onto his music’s surface, leaving it to echo itself at the threshold of the audible: in Moses’s cry and the final F♯’s scrape of rosin on catgut, the loss of musical form will have occurred through the empty repetition of the utmost musical form.³²⁰ The silence of order and the silence of entropy thus collapse into one another. Rather than aiming for any immediate expression of the idea, then, Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron* gets stuck on a kind of loop, mechanically repeating and permuting the rhetorical, dispositional

³¹⁸ As Daniel C. Melnick correctly observes, in referencing passages from “Plusieurs silences,” Lyotard’s use of the word “tragic” is somewhat pejorative: “Lyotard would abjure what he sees as Schoenberg’s puritanical seeking of ‘the tragic’ and of a ‘therapeutics’ in which music is a ‘discourse’ of stigmatizing negativity and ‘control’” (57). However, within the broader arc of Lyotard’s writing as a whole, this notion of the tragic as “l’intensité hors signification” can also be seen as somewhat prefigurative of Lyotard’s later understanding of affect, and “the inaudible” in music. Read from the point of view of Lyotard’s later writings, like “Musique et postmodernité,” this tragic aspect of Schoenberg would be the driving force of the latter’s approach to what Lyotard calls serialism’s “over-articulation.” This is to say that Lyotard’s position on Schoenberg seems to change considerably over time.

³¹⁹ Although, of course, this working through gets nowhere, unlike in a (successful) psychoanalysis.

³²⁰ One might also read the mechanics of this Lyotardian reinscription of Schoenberg’s unconscious idea onto the surface of his music through one of Lyotard’s own earlier readings of Freud (vis-à-vis Lacan) in *Discours, Figure* (specifically the chapter titled “Le Travail du rêve ne pense pas”). Here Lyotard argues, against the tradition of interpreting dreams as having discernible content, that the dream “n’est pas la parole du désir, mais son oeuvre” (*Discours, Figure* 239). In other words, desire does not “say something,” does not signify an unconscious secret, through a dream; instead, the dream is *itself* the work of desire: “On comprendrait que l’accomplissement du désir, grande fonction du rêve, consiste non pas dans la représentation d’une satisfaction (qui au contraire, quand elle a lieu, réveille), mais entièrement dans l’activité imaginaire elle-même. Ce n’est pas le contenu du rêve qui accomplissait le désir, c’est l’acte de rêver, de phantasieren” (*Discours, Figure* 246-247 ; emphasis added). For Lyotard, the dream-work presents a relationship to unconscious desire, but not in such a way that desire would be contained within it. It is instead in the very activity of dreaming itself that the unconscious presents itself, as a play of surfaces, and not as what supposedly lies below or behind them. Similarly, Schoenberg writes, “one tries to recognize events and feelings in music as if they must be there” (SI 142)—as if they must lie hidden beneath music, as if music contained emotion or event, as if there were something called “music” in the first place and not merely the sonic domination of time by its dispositif.

structures *upon which all expression is based*, developing these organizational principles without depth or appearance, such that they become evacuated and tautological. Analyses that solely concentrate on forms of representation and the “symbolism” (Wörner 77-79) within Schoenberg’s opera—and many musicological studies convincingly do this³²¹—therefore only end up with sets of symmetries and partitions, images of images which cannot restore a capacity for expression that the work ultimately rejects.

* * *

Even the title of *Moses und Aron* is an image. Schoenberg’s superstitious fear of the number thirteen had driven him to spell Aron’s name with one “a” instead of two (Shell, 281, fn.68; Johnson, 8, fn. 7), so that it only contained twelve letters.³²² “*Moses und Aron*” is thus not merely the transparent alphabetic representation of an ideal voice, but also a graven object or icon in its own right, through which the content of the opera is prefigured even before it begins. Looking more closely at the title in this way, one might also wonder about the *und* as well, which acts as the conjunction between the opera’s two eponymous characters. Perhaps it might bear some obscure relation to the famous metadramatic reflection on the *und* in act 2 of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*.³²³ Indeed, according to the oppositions that it sets up, the opera might have

³²¹ Not only do many analysts convincingly demonstrate the different symbolisms and/or leitmotifs in Schoenberg’s opera, but these analyses are absolutely key to understanding the work on a musical level. However, the broader aesthetic concerns of the opera would suggest that such analyses should not be used to supplement the missing formal unity of the work.

³²² As others have noted, the number twelve also dovetails nicely with Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique.

³²³ In act 2, scene 2 of *Tristan und Isolde*, describing a love that ultimately leads to their death, Isolde sings “Doch uns’re Liebe / heisst sie nicht / Tristan und Isolde? / Dies süsse Wörtlein: / und, was es bindet, / der Liebe Bund [But our sweet loving, / Is it not / Tristan and Isolde? / The word that joins us: / ‘And’ how it binds us / In loving bonds]” (*Tristan und Isolde*, 73). The characters’ reflection on the word “und” thus also references the “und” of the title, *Tristan und Isolde*, gesturing toward its importance for an understanding of the opera: rather than a simple conjunction, “und” would be here the most important word in the opera’s title, naming the love that joins the two characters and for which they die. The identities of Tristan and Isolde are thus ultimately destroyed in rather than joined by this conjunction. Similarly, the “und” of *Moses und Aron* indicates the nature of the characters’ relationship in the opera. While they do not provide a reflection on the opera’s title in the same way as *Tristan und Isolde* does, Moses’s concession at the end of the opera, that he himself has created images, finally places him

been more accurately titled *Moses oder Aron* (were it not for the triskaidekaphobia). But this would be wrong, because ultimately the opera does not really offer its listener a choice (“oder”) between the two figures. Although its libretto ostensibly presents a philosophical argument between Moses and Aron—between, in other words, idea and image—*both* of these characters nonetheless enact Schoenberg’s important observation that “feeling is already form, the idea is already the word” (SI 269). Adorno was thus correct in claiming that “Moses und der Tanz ums goldene Kalb sprechen eigentlich dieselbe Sprache in der Oper” (“Sakrales Fragment” 468).³²⁴ Such a language would no longer offer any choice between a pure idea and its mediation in images: the one will have always already contaminated the other.³²⁵ In this way, the opera’s idea would be indistinguishable from its corruption. And in this way, Schoenberg “takes back” (à la Leverkühn) the possibility of clearly articulating any *idea* or any “good”—whether conservative or revolutionary, for example—through which his work could be finally and formally unified. Beginning with a hope for the emancipation of a *vox Dei*, he ends instead with a *vox clamantis in deserto*, crying out and falling silent on the Mount Nebo of his own expression, stammering in recognition that a promised land can only remain what it is by remaining promised—that is, compromised.

alongside Aron, in such a way that the “und” in the title of *Moses und Aron* can be retroactively read as already having marked how these two characters are not as opposed to one another as the plot might initially lead one to believe.

³²⁴ “Moses and the Dance round the Golden Calf actually speak the same language in the opera” (Adorno, “Sacred Fragment” 241).

³²⁵ One might understand this to be what Lacoue-Labarthe means when, at the end of his essay on *Moses und Aron*, he writes (presumably in reference to Hegel) that “[l]’art est la religion dans les limites de la simple inadéquation” (*Musica Ficta* 264).

Chapter 4. Vivier and the Loss of Origin

*Du doigt que, sans le vieux santal
Ni le vieux livre, elle balance
Sur le plumage instrumental,
Musicienne du silence.
Stéphane Mallarmé, “Sainte”*

*Cette musique du silence qui existe au fond de moi [...]
Claude Vivier, “Imagine”*

With Schoenberg, then, the expression of a divine musical idea gives way to tautology—its figure of a *vox Dei* proceeding from the ultimate *vox nihili*, repeating Moses’s misrecognition of image as the voice of God: his opera thus falls silent not in spite of but *through* its clamoring for expression. This chapter will now explore a similar—and equally religious—silence, in the queer Québécois composer and librettist Claude Vivier (1948-1983), whose music sought its own kind of promised land of origin and immediacy. In this regard, Laurent Feneyrou, one of Vivier’s commentators, notes the persistent “desire for transcendence [*désir de transcendance*]”³²⁶ (4) in Vivier’s works, while Jonathan Goldman similarly describes their quest for a “prelapsarian unity” (221). For Vivier, however, such quests are always undertaken in vain: his music, in other words, traces out the disappearance of the possibility for this transcendence and unity at the same time as it searches for them, which results in themes of abandonment and absence—and even what Bob Gilmore, Vivier’s biographer, calls an “omnipresence of death”—in his music (Gilmore, “On Claude Vivier’s ‘Lonely Child’” 9). These themes of death and absence come to stand in for an origin that will have been always already corrupted and lost to the subject.

³²⁶ This chapter was drafted in partial fulfillment of a graduate certificate in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. French quotations are given in translation, usually alongside the original. Translations of Vivier (except those quoted in Gilmore), as well as his French-language commentators, are my own.

Such a loss would need to be first understood in Vivier's work according to an *autobiographical* register, as several others have already suggested in different contexts (Goldman 206; Gilmore CV57 and 182; Vivier, ECV 79). This would occur on at least three levels with regard to the events of his life:³²⁷ firstly, and most obviously, Vivier was an orphan, an *enfant abandonné*—which is to say that the narrative of his childhood itself begins with a disappearance of origin. Secondly, at least in part because of his overt and often outspoken queerness, Vivier was denied his childhood dream of joining the clergy, resulting in the inability to achieve the solace and unity with God he desired through traditional religious experience. Vivier was in this sense forced into music as a surrogate medium through which to pursue his often quite fervent religious proclivities (which nevertheless stood at odds with his sexuality). A tendency to portray music as a kind of sacred medium, then, can be found throughout his work as a manner of supplementing this inaugural loss of his religious vocation.³²⁸ Thirdly, and perhaps most famously, Vivier's work is also marked by the loss of his own life—and by the mystery surrounding his final composition, *Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele?*, which some think presents a strange prefiguration or even dramatization of the gruesome manner in which he was murdered at the age of 35. Toward the end of this piece, a voice, which introduces itself as Claude, describes a man named Harry, who “without any other introduction [...] drew a dagger from his dark black jacket probably bought in Paris and sank it right into my heart” (ECV

³²⁷ In the first chapter of his dissertation on queerness in Vivier's music, Amit Menachem Gilutz also mentions several of these moments of Vivier's life. Here, however, I will consider Vivier's biography as such only to examine how his music displaces it within a larger economy of death.

³²⁸ This tendency is perhaps best articulated in one of his most often quoted writings on art, from 1971: “I want art to be a sacred act, the revelation of forces, communication with these forces. The musician must no longer arrange music but revelatory seances, seances of the incantation of the forces of nature, of the forces that have existed, exist, and will exist, of the forces that are truth [*Je veux que l'art soit l'acte sacré, la révélation des forces, la communication avec ces forces. Le musicien doit organiser non plus de la musique mais des séances de révélation, des séances d'incantation des forces de la nature, des forces qui ont existé, existent et existeront, des forces qui sont la vérité*]” (ECV 49).

135).³²⁹ The name of the man whom Vivier had brought home from a gay bar and who, in a Paris apartment, actually plunged a dagger into Vivier's heart and killed him in this way was not Harry, but Pascal Dolzan (cf. Gilmore CV 214-222). In the years since his death, almost anyone who has commented upon Vivier's music has weighed in on the potential relationship between the fictional murder in this last work and the real murder that took place in almost the same manner: diagnoses range from coincidental hate crime to deliberately staged suicide.

Vivier's death, however, and the manner in which it may or may not be inscribed into this last composition, comes to complicate the approach that understands Vivier's music as a form of autobiography. It suggests instead that, at a certain point in Vivier's work, autobiography gives way to what might be loosely called an "autothanatographical" or "allothanatographical" tendency (cf. Derrida, *The Post-Card* 273; Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Echo of the Subject" 179; Burt 6),³³⁰ which would formally displace the possibility of understanding it as the simple expression of a life. Ellen Burt describes the relation between autobiography and the idea of "autothanatography" in the following way:

autobiographical writing—because it is a text, because it testifies in and to the absence of the I—has the potential to witness for alterity unrecoverable by the subject as its other. Such writing would no longer exactly be autobiography, but rather *autothanatographical writing*: the writing of the death of the subject. [...] When alterity strikes to make the discursive subject 'I' into a grammatical subject—as happens midway through Rimbaud's famous sentence, 'I is an other,' for instance—a discourse about experience becomes a discourse about the structure and conditions of experience. In considering the

³²⁹ Translation of: "sans autre forme de présentation [...] sortit de son veston noir foncé acheté probablement à Paris un poignard et me l'enfonça en plein cœur."

³³⁰ In her experimental doctoral thesis on Vivier's *Kopernikus*, Louise Bail suggests in passing the notion of an "altro-biographie" in relation to Vivier's work (*Kopernikus: La berceuse à Claude Vivier* 89-90).

conditions of possibility and impossibility of experience, the work is then called to ask after other possible sets of transactions with those conditions; and, finding subjectivity imperiled and its survival uncertain, to look abroad and invent with those conditions (6). Similarly, Vivier's music, even if it begins from the autobiographical, at a certain point no longer acts as a "discourse about experience," and instead begins to function as "a discourse about the structure and conditions of experience." In other words, the figures of loss that Vivier would presumably draw from his life and then subsequently present in his compositions—through forms of unknowability, abandonment, and death—ultimately permeate his work to such an extent that, paradoxically, it can no longer give voice to his subjective biography in any straightforward way. In this sense, I will argue here that Vivier's music does not express a loss of origin (as childhood abandonment, alienation from God, etc.), but rather enacts how this loss of origin corrupts the possibility for such an expression in the first place. In what follows, then, I will explore how this loss functions in two of Vivier's musico-dramatic works—namely in *Kopernikus: Opéra-rituel de mort* and *Lonely Child*—focusing first on how they figure it in relation to a notion of *childhood*, and then exploring how this notion of childhood (or, more precisely, loss of childhood) is marked by Vivier's relationship to his queerness.

1. *L'abandon d'enfant*

By contrast with his sexual identity, which is never *explicitly* represented or thematized in his musical or dramatic works,³³¹ one of the most predominating and recurrent themes in Vivier's work is that of childhood. However, in Vivier's case especially, the one is not entirely distinguishable from the other, not least because of the fact that, at the age of ten, Vivier was raped by his adoptive uncle (cf. Gilmore, CV 10; Gilutz 16; Bail 14). In this light, it would be

³³¹ I will discuss why this might be the case in more detail below (see Section 4).

easy to read Vivier's persistent interest in fetishized figures of childhood—in, for instance, his his adaptation in *Lonely Child* of Tazio from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, or even his intense interest in Lewis Carroll—in a biographical sense, as mediations of his own experience as a victim of pedophilic sexual abuse (despite his insistence that he was unbothered by the event (Gilmore, CV 10)). Yet, while such biographical questions are without doubt present in Vivier's art, and one might rightly point them out, one might simultaneously point out that Vivier's presentations of childhood are normally not offered as any explicit commentary on his own history (with the notable exception of *Journal*), and that they are more often deployed as *generalized* figures for purity and origination (for the purity of an origin, however, that will have always already disappeared). For instance, Michel Gonneville, another Canadian composer and friend of Vivier, described how “[s]ometimes it could be tiring, [talking to Vivier] about what he was doing, about *pureté*—how many times did he use that word! The purity of childhood, the purity of an interval, the reduction to almost nothing, silence, death, etc.” (qtd. In Gilmore, CV 171). In a similar vein, Gilmore quotes Vivier's remark that “[a]ll my fucking music is always the same thing—I just want to get this purity of expression [...]. This need, this very need of purity, this need of sun and color and childhood-like things, it's also a part of a human being” (Vivier, qtd. in Gilmore, CV 126). Such a desire for a childlike purity in Vivier's music can certainly be seen, on the one hand, to reflect a genuine and intense quest to recover and restore his own origins, to repair his initial abandonment, to restore a childhood lost by having had to become an adult too soon:

Yes, I always wanted to be a child, eternally a child—but life, its relations obliging one to a certain form of reality sometimes obliged me to lose sight of childhood, its purity, its midnight masses and also its cruelty [...] (ECV 124).³³²

It would be naïve to claim that such a figure for lost purity is not heavily determined by Vivier's own experiences—as an orphan, as a queer, as a victim of rape—but (and this is my claim here) it would be equally misleading to assume that Vivier's music would present any straightforward *expression* of these aspects of his subjectivity. Indeed, on the other hand, Vivier's work might be seen to present a challenge to precisely this rather traditional model of expressivity, according to which art would measure itself by the effective communication of an individual's experience or identity. To better articulate the stakes and contours of this challenge, however, I will now interrupt myself in making a brief detour through three theoretical figures, each of which will provide a framework for interpreting the figures of childhood that will be explored the subsequent sections of this chapter.

* * *

1. Perhaps the most obviously pertinent model of childhood to which one might turn here is that offered by psychoanalysis. One might, in other words, consider how Vivier's approach to childhood could be recontextualized in light of Freud's:³³³ one might recall Freud's notion of the infant's "polymorphously perverse" disposition in particular, which, as Freud speculates, only becomes an adult form of sexuality through a long process of "psychosexual development."

According to the five-stage process that Freud outlines, the infant's initially less discriminating

³³² Translation of: "Oui, j'ai toujours voulu être un enfant, éternellement un enfant—mais la vie, ses rapports obligés avec une certaine forme de réalité m'ont obligé quelquefois à perdre de vue l'enfance, sa pureté, ses messes de minuit et aussi sa cruauté."

³³³ Although psychoanalysis would be in any case thematically appropriate to Vivier's work, it was also a manner of thinking in which he took an explicit interest. For instance, in his "Quelques considérations sur la composition musicale," he describes "the almost existential dichotomy that has appeared from one era to the next *between* the ego and the 'id' [*la dichotomie presque existentielle qui a surgi d'époque en époque entre le moi et le «ça»*]" (ibid.).

search for pleasure becomes progressively narrowed through a series of stages, such that it ultimately fixates (upon reaching adolescence) on the genitalia of the opposite sex as its final object of desire. For Freud, however, the success of such a “development” is consistently under threat: its progress toward a normal, heterosexual *telos* can be and often is corrupted at different stages and in different ways, resulting in perversions such as “fixation” (sexual fetishes) or “inversion” (homosexuality). But all of these possibilities would remain present, unconsciously and *in potentia*, in any relation to pleasure and feeling.³³⁴ Understood along these Freudian lines, then, childhood for Vivier would represent an unconscious plenitude of feeling and unrestricted desire, existing outside of conflict with the reality principle.

2. Similarly, and explicitly following Freud, Jean-François Lyotard addressed the persistence of a similar relationship between childhood and adult subjectivity—although, notably, Lyotard’s concerns had more to do with a broader understanding of affectivity rather than “sexuality” in any narrow(ed) sense.³³⁵ In this regard, Lyotard describes the Freudian approach to infantile sexuality as a more conceptually limiting understanding of infancy, and one which moreover gives rise to a kind of anachronism: “[t]he pleasures and the pains experienced

³³⁴ Freud: “It is an instructive fact that under the influence of seduction children can become polymorphously perverse, and can be led into all possible kinds of sexual irregularities. This shows that an aptitude for them is innately present in their disposition. There is consequently little resistance towards carrying them out, since the mental dams against sexual excesses—shame, disgust and morality—have either not yet been constructed at all or are only in course of construction, according to the age of the child. [...] Prostitutes exploit the same polymorphous, that is, infantile, disposition for the purposes of their profession; and, considering the immense number of women who are prostitutes or who must be supposed to have an aptitude for prostitution without becoming engaged in it, it becomes impossible not to recognize that this same disposition to perversions of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic” (191).

³³⁵ Though he was always somewhat concerned with affect, Jean-François Lyotard’s most explicit engagements with it can be found in his writing from the 1980s and 90s, in texts like “Emma,” “Voix,” and especially “La phrase-affect: d’un supplément au Différend.” The latter was given initially as a lecture in Brussels in 1990, titled “L’inarticulé ou le différend même,” and offers probably his most rigorous account of the experience of affect. There, Lyotard portrays Freud’s understanding of infantile sexuality as misrecognition of a more general affectivity: “Freud might have persisted in wanting to name this infantile affectivity *sexuality*” (240). (Indeed, it would be important to recognize that *the category of “sexuality”*—no matter how broadened—when applied to a conception of the infant, will be anachronistic.) For more on Lyotard’s understanding of affect, see Claire Nouvet’s “The Inarticulate Affect” and Geoffrey Bennington’s “Childish Things” in *Minima Memoria*, as well as several of essays in *Traversals of Affect: On Jean-François Lyotard*, especially Nouvet’s “For Emma.”

in the adventure of the *infans* are only attributed to the excitation of such or such an erogenous zone by the articulated discourse of adults” (240). Instead, then, of portraying childhood and infancy (perhaps best summed up in the French word *enfance*) as necessarily circumscribed by a Freudian economy of *distinct* (even partial) objects of potential pleasure, which would be articulated within a process of development, Lyotard radicalizes the indeterminacy and *inarticulateness* of the infantile relationship to feeling that Freud began to think.

Here taking the notion of infancy literally—in relation to the word’s Latin origin, *infantia*, which signifies both infancy or childhood and, more generally, a lack of speech—Lyotard focuses on the manner in which an ambiguous experience of affect relates to the adult’s social injunction to articulate themselves within a comprehensible discourse.³³⁶ Following an approach to language he had outlined in an earlier text (*Le Différend*), Lyotard thus investigates the extent to which an infantile experience of affect presents itself as a kind of “phrase,” and specifically as an *inarticulate* phrase that defies any intersubjective demand for comprehensibility.³³⁷ From the point of view of language, then, the unconscious persistence of

³³⁶ In an online article for L’Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique, Laurent Feneyrou mentions a similar understanding of infancy explicitly in relation to Vivier (3).

³³⁷ For Lyotard—who is attempting to think through the potential relationships between affectivity and signification—a phrase can be considered “articulate” to the extent that it meets four criteria that are, in his words, “polarised according to two axes” (234). On what he calls the “axis of address,” a phrase would first have to have an *addresser* and an *addressee*, while on the “semantico-referential axis,” a phrase would have to have a *sense* and a *referent*. However, as opposed to this logical, four-part articulation, a “phrase-affect” would be *inarticulate* and “tautegorical” (i.e. it would not refer to anything outside of itself), and it thereby cannot enter directly into the discursive relationships necessary for sense and reference to occur. Correspondingly, affect cannot have an addresser or addressee: it would not be, in other words, sent by oneself to another, or to oneself even, as a kind of message. The *infantile* character of affect instead can only *interrupt* the adult’s discursively articulable categories, through which it organizes its identity as a subject in the first place. As soon as the subject incorporates the experience of affect into these categories, and thereby “makes sense” of how they feel, the initial phrase-affect as such will already have been lost. In other words, affective experience can only intrude into or onto the subject in a radically *neutral* and non-subjective way, as one can hear for instance in certain infantile formulations like “it hurts” or “it’s alright” (Lyotard, “The Phrase-Affect,” 235): only secondarily would the subject then position itself in relation to this experience, reinscribing it within its logic and subsequently articulating itself as “I am hurt,” or “I don’t mind” (one is reminded of Hanslick’s distinction between *Gefühl* and *Empfindung*—see Chapter 2). This radically neutral, non-subjective, and inarticulate understanding of affect then leads Lyotard to figure it through a kind of silence or mutism, which is uncoincidentally also a somewhat major motif for Vivier.

“infantile” affects manifests in a genre of phrase that resists discursive expression, and that moreover is fundamentally incompatible with it—never articulated so much as coming to interrupt the very conditions of articulation itself: “[t]he phrase-affect appears not to let itself be linked according to the rules of any genre of discourse; it appears on the contrary only to be able to suspend or interrupt the linkages, whatever they are” (Lyotard, “The Phrase-Affect” 235).

Lyotard goes on to characterize the manner in which such suspensions and interruptions of discursive articulation take place in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of transference.³³⁸ In spoken discourse, for instance, infantile affects would transferentially (one might even want to say *parasitically*) manifest on the level of unmarked vocal accents, timbral inconsistencies, distortions, figures of silence (aposiopesis, anacoluthon, etc.), that come to disrupt the presentation of any semantic content. However, such transferences of infantile affect are not, for Lyotard, limited to speech: elsewhere, he also considers this affectivity more directly in relation to notions of *musical articulation*, which is to say in relation to the binding and articulation of a “sonorous matter” by musical forms (in pitch classes, fixed durations, instrumentation, etc.).³³⁹ For instance—and I have already quoted this passage in the previous chapter—in an essay titled “Musique mutique,” Lyotard describes such a relationship between music and affect in the following way, which seems particularly appropriate to Vivier:

There is a sonorous matter that is not what the musician calls the material. The latter is understood as the timbre of the sound. Matter is not heard, it is the sorrow of being affected. This sorrow wails; inarticulate, it asks nothing. Affection is the threat of being

³³⁸ Laplanche and Pontalis’s *The Language of Psychoanalysis* defines transference as a process of “the actualization of unconscious wishes” that “uses specific objects and operates in the framework of a specific relationship established with these objects” (455). For Lyotard, the immediate objects of transference would be articulate phrases themselves. He thus writes: “It is called transference. The affect can present itself only in situating itself in the universe presented by an actual phrase” (239). It is probably helpful to think such an approach to transference outside of its applicability or inapplicability to the mechanics the psychoanalytic session.

³³⁹ See Chapter 3.

abandoned and lost. The breath of the lament, which is sonorous matter, clandestinely inhabits the audible material, the timbre (“Musique Mutique” 230; emphasis added).

Affect, in other words, would not be simply articulated or conveyed by musical material, as its content, but would instead occupy this material at the borders of its ability to constitute and articulate itself in general, at the moments when the integrity of its structures (such as harmony or even, as we will see, timbre in general) breaks down—when the grain of the voice cracks and the listening subject’s ability to consciously integrate what it hears is threatened.³⁴⁰ This sonic experience of affect, as a threat of silence posed to the ego’s ability to consciously listen, is—as I will explore below—precisely what Vivier explores and attempts to render audible through his music. Vivier, in other words, can be understood to deliberately attempt to rupture and hold open the conditions of both linguistic and musical articulation in his compositions, in order to produce an experience of affective estrangement³⁴¹ or distance from one’s ability to consciously process the sound that one hears—an estrangement that I am tempted to call here his musicalized *abandon d’enfant*, his abandonment of expression to an *enfance* or speechlessness that proclaims itself (*bannum*) otherwise.

3. The temporality of this strange and radically vague conception of an inarticulate, unconscious infancy, which would thwart one’s attempt to grow up and leave it behind, might then suggest one further, queerer manner of considering the experience of childhood. Indeed, the

³⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Lyotard specifically describes a “non-formalized matter” that “escapes the syntheses, both of apprehension and of reproduction, which usually see to the grasping of sensory matter to ends of pleasure (through forms), or of knowledge (through schemata and concepts). If there is no subject to refer to itself, i.e. to its power of synthesis, the sensory forms and conceptual operators, so as to refer to this nuance, the reason is that sonorous matter which is this nuance is there only to the extent that, then and there, the subject is not there” (The Inhuman, 156-157). One might compare this non-formalized sonic materiality to Vivier’s strange description of a silent “cry” that “can only originate in the breaking of the ego, the road to which must be taken in silence, alone [ne peut originer[sic] que du bris de l’ego et le chemin jusque-là doit se faire en silence, seul]” (ECV 53).

³⁴¹ In “Quelques considérations sur la composition musicale,” Vivier articulates a rather idiomatic understanding of Bertolt Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* explicitly in terms of psychoanalysis (describing it instead, probably by accident, as an “*Entfremdungs Effekt*”) (ECV 62).

conceptual relationship between childhood and queerness has become something of a topos for contemporary queer theory, and has been analyzed from several angles already, by several well-known writers, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Moon, Steven Bruhm, Lee Edelman, James Kincaid, Kathryn Bond Stockton, and others.³⁴² In *The Queer Child: Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, for instance, Stockton asks what it is like—and indeed whether it is possible—to “grow up” as a queer child. By “growing up,” of course, Stockton refers not to the facts of aging, but to the developmental and disciplinary processes—for instance, those psychosexual stages explored by Freud—according to which children are passively interpellated into normativizing (and particularly heterosexual) forms of behavior. According to this idea of “growing up,” then, for Stockton, queer children would be effectively barred from assuming or articulating their identity by discursive and social practices that implicitly assume all children to be either already heterosexual or at least on the way to heterosexuality. Borrowing a term from Sedgwick, Stockton describes how this predicament produces a kind of rupture within the temporality of the “protogay” child’s identity:

The protogay child has only appeared through an act of retrospection and after a death.

For this queer child, whatever its conscious grasp of itself, has not been able to present itself according to the category ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’—categories culturally deemed too

adult, since they are sexual, though we do presume every child to be straight. The effect

³⁴² Cf. Stockton’s *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, which I briefly discuss here, as well as the essays in *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (eds. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley), Sedgwick’s “How to Bring Your Kids up Gay,” Moon’s *A Small Boy and Others*, the idea of “reproductive futurity” in Edelman’s *No Future*, Kincaid’s *Erotic Innocence*, and “Queers in (Single-Family) Space” (an interview with Moon and Sedgwick). Or, consider Karín Lesnik-Oberstein and Stephen Thomson’s critical understanding of Moon and Sedgwick in “What is Queer Theory Doing with the Child?” as well as Kenneth Kidd’s response to this response in “Queer Theory’s Child and Children’s Literature Studies.” There is an entire discourse on this topic, which warrants pointing out, even if I will avoid directly engaging with it here. Moreover, in the *Three Essays*, Freud himself almost goes so far as to link his discussion of the infant’s polymorphously perversity with a certain idea of a *bisexuality* that he also calls “psychical hermaphroditism” (141). Hélène Cixous complicates this Freudian approach to bisexuality, writing of the genderlessness of the child and its “*other bisexuality* on which every subject not enclosed in the false theater of phallogocentric representationalism has founded his/her erotic universe” (884).

for the child who already feels queer (different, odd, out-of-sync, and attracted to same-sex peers) is an asynchronous self-relation (6).

Stockton here articulates a certain conflict in psychosexual development (whether in the strictly Freudian sense or not), again between the experience of the child and the categories of the adult—and the subsequently uncanny experience of the former, inasmuch as it might fail to conform to the latter’s “normal” or “proper” sexual teleology. The queer (or “protogay”) child would be made aware of its failure on at least an unconscious or preconscious level, and ultimately would be able only to consciously make sense of such disjointed experience in a retroactive or belated manner—*après-coup*, Freud would say *nachträglich* (Stockton 14).³⁴³ From this perspective, Stockton goes on to describe the experience of the child more generally in terms of a certain *spectrality*: “[t]he child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back. It is a ghostly, unreachable fancy [...]” (5). The figure of the child would be thus a phantom projection,³⁴⁴ an affective specter or echo³⁴⁵ that intimately yet inaccessibly informs the experience of the adult who attempts to reconstitute this childhood after the fact, and in terms that are foreign to it. In the sections that follow, I will give more specific examples of how this phantom—this polymorphous, inarticulate, absent and belatedly reconstituted childhood—comes to haunt Vivier’s music.

* * *

It is also worth noting that Vivier himself had on at least two occasions begun to sketch out his own general theory of a certain musical *temps perdu*, through which he might be seen to have formalized some of the problems associated with what Stockton theorizes as a disappearing (and

³⁴³ While more pronounced in “queer” children, Stockton correctly observes that a similar temporal structure applies to so-called “straight” children as well (7), since no child is ultimately able to identify as heterosexual either—even if, socially, everything around them assumes the inevitability of this identity.

³⁴⁴ See also Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.

³⁴⁵ See also Lacoue-Labarthe’s “The Echo of the Subject.”

necessarily *nachträglich*) queer childhood. Amit Menachem Gilutz, in his 2016 dissertation in the Department of Music at Cornell University (27)—which is currently the only sustained investigation of queerness in Vivier’s work—has already suggested as much. This understanding of temporality can be seen in two of Vivier’s short essays from 1982: “Que propose la musique?” and “Pour Gödel” (see also Gilutz 95 and 103; Bail, *Kopernikus: la berceuse à Claude Vivier* 342-345). In the latter essay (the title of which references Douglas Hofstadter’s pop-philosophical best-seller, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*), Vivier describes sound as “the point of non-contact between melancholy and hope (the past and the future)” (ECV 126),³⁴⁶ and thus assigns specifically affective components to the different phenomenological orientations toward time. Having ascribed affective valences to subjective temporality in this way, he goes on to define “melancholy” as a certain relation to “everything that is no longer but that survives in the form of memory,”³⁴⁷ and as what therefore “allows for looking upon the past with a tenderness that objectivizes events and leads them back to a single point, memory” (ibid.).³⁴⁸ By contrast, the essay figures the future in terms of a “hope:” “an imaginary space where all is possible, where dream exists” (ibid.).³⁴⁹ The moment in which sound occurs, as Vivier describes it here, exists at the point of “non-contact” between this past and future colored respectively by melancholy and hope—a point of non-contact since they never actually meet in any entirely determinate way: instead, the past and the future, for Vivier, here only name affective tendencies at the outer limits of an unlocalizable, ever-vanishing moment or event in which sound will have been already lost

³⁴⁶ Translation of: “le point de non-contact entre la mélancolie et l'espoir (le passé et le futur).”

³⁴⁷ Translation of: “tout ce qui n'est plus mais qui subsiste sous la forme d'un souvenir.”

³⁴⁸ Translation of: “permet de regarder le passé avec la tendresse qui objectivise les événements et les ramène à un seul point, la mémoire.”

³⁴⁹ Translation of: “[...] un espace imaginaire où tout est possible, où le rêve existe.” Vivier, moreover, figures this idea of hope in explicitly political terms: “Often, alas, this dream is thought, organized not by creative forces by political forces [*Souvent, hélas, ce rêve est pensé, organisé non par des forces créatrices mais par les forces politiques. C'est ce que j'appelle un imaginaire politique*]” (ECV 126). He then offers four potential valences of or responses to such a politicization of the imaginary: submission, suicide, creation, and revolution (ibid.)

to death or melancholy, and in which, simultaneously, it will perpetually renew itself. In this sense, Vivier writes elsewhere that “I no longer think then of the ‘future’ nor of the past but rather of *a sort of vanished present, a sort of impalpable joy mixed with the sadness of a child who has lost their mother*” (ECV 60-61; emphasis added).³⁵⁰ Here, then, at the point of non-contact between present and future, hope and melancholy, Vivier inscribes a figure of childhood abandonment into the very temporality of his music. This non-contact or non-presence, then, would no longer simply reflect the tragic losses of Vivier’s biography: it would also generalize such loss into a spectral, infantile moment or event³⁵¹ that the listening subject would be *a priori* unable to synthesize and thus unable to recognize.³⁵² It will now remain to be seen how Vivier traces out this kind of transcendental abandonment in his art.

³⁵⁰ Translation of: “Je ne pense plus alors au « futur » ni au passé mais bien à *une sorte de présent disparu, une sorte de joie impalpable mêlée à la tristesse de l’enfant qui a perdu sa mère.*”

³⁵¹ Here is another possible intersection with Lyotard.

³⁵² Vivier further identifies the point of this affective-temporal non-presence with a despair or a *désespoir* (“The point of non-contact is named despair [*Le point de non-contact se nomme désespoir*]” (ECV 126)), which he describes in the following way: “It is a sound, then, that was at the source of despair, since only a sound could have cut the temporal continuum. This sound perhaps came from the black hole of the human unconscious. This sound created silence around itself, that is to say the absence of sound, simply absence, therefore desire! / Despairing that they can never abolish chance (the cosmic dice being immutable), the human chose to contravene this immemorial law of sound/silence in creating music [*C’est donc un son qui a été à la source du désespoir, car seul un son pouvait couper le continuum temporel. Ce son provenait peut-être du trou noir de l’inconscient humain. Ce son a créé autour de lui le silence, c’est-à-dire l’absence de son, l’absence tout court, donc le désir! / L’humain désespéré de ne jamais pouvoir abolir le hasard (les dés cosmiques étant immuables), a choisi de contrer cette loi immémoriale du son/silence en créant la musique*]” (126). Music is thus doubly enfolded within a silence, between an unrecoverable past and an unforeseeable future, between melancholy and hope, absence and desire. Within this description, Vivier makes an important reference, itself unmarked or silent, to Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés n’abolira le hasard*: this reference is significant not only as a poetic intertext, but also because it sheds some additional light on Vivier’s ideas. First of all, it suggests that Vivier’s *désespoir* should not be translated or understood simply as “despair” or “desperation,” since in negating (*dés*) a hope (*espoir*) it also continuously rekindles it in relation to the contingency of the future—as the *espoir*, in other words, contained within every roll of the *dés*. Uncoincidentally, Mallarmé himself uses this word in a similar way to describe his practice of reading in “La Musique et les Lettres” (a lecture that he explicitly dedicated to the relationship between literature and music), when he writes: “Strictement j’envisage, écartés vos folios d’études, rubriques, parchemin, la lecture comme une pratique désespérée” (*Oeuvres Complètes*, v. 2, 67). Much more remains to be said about the potential resonances between Vivier and Mallarmé.

2. *Kopernikus*

At the time of his untimely death, Vivier had plans for multiple operas: one, for instance, would have been about the travels and linguistic experiences of Marco Polo; another would have been about the death of Tchaikovsky, which Vivier rather cryptically and interestingly planned to write “in the line of Dante, Mozart, and Bataille” (qtd. in Gilmore 211). The only opera that he was able to complete in his lifetime, however, was eventually titled *Kopernikus: Opéra-rituel de mort* (for which he composed both music and libretto). It was commissioned by the Atelier de jeu scénique de l’Université de Montréal, and subsequently debuted in Montréal in May 1980 (ECV 95), though Gilmore notes that Vivier had been thinking about it as early as 1978. The project was initially conceived under the working title of *The Old Alice*, through which Vivier had planned to explore Carroll’s famous character “80 years after her experience through the looking glass” (CV 152)—to follow her as she looked back on her adventures as an elderly woman approaching the end. But this plan never materialized, and the opera was changed and named instead for a seemingly very different figure—the Renaissance mathematician and astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus. However, as Louise Bail suggests, these two figures (Alice and Copernicus) would have been nevertheless similar in Vivier’s mind, since “[l]ike Alice, Copernicus dreams of a firmament of impossibles” (Bail 18).³⁵³

Despite the opera’s title, the central character in its final version is neither Alice nor Copernicus at all, but Agni, a character named for the Hindu god of fire—the deity who often presides over the fires of ritual sacrifice. This loose association with fire and sacrifice is one reason why the opera is subtitled “Opéra-rituel de mort.”³⁵⁴ Indeed, a ritual death is the subject

³⁵³ Translation of: “Comme Alice, Copernic rêve au firmament des impossibles.”

³⁵⁴ Besides its more obvious relation to *Kopernikus*—Vivier’s “opéra-rituel de mort”—ritual is musically and thematically important elsewhere in Vivier’s oeuvre, where he often though not always associates it with Eastern, perhaps somewhat orientalist tropes. In *Lonely Child*, for instance, he makes use of the Japanese *rin* to explicitly

of the opera's "plot," or rather its lack thereof: inasmuch as *Kopernikus* can be said to tell a story at all, it is only one of Agni's slow departure from life, as "she"³⁵⁵ is ushered, little by little, into a realm of silence and death. Early in the opera, for instance, Agni is told: "the melody of death will enter you very slowly my friend. Welcome to the silent land" (98).³⁵⁶ She is reassured, however, that this melodic death will not be all that bad: "Don't be afraid this death will be soft like a mother" (ibid.).³⁵⁷ Since life in Vivier is associated with abandonment and the absence of childhood purity vis-à-vis a ruthless reality principle, death paradoxically becomes the only possible mother. Death is thus presented not as an adversary, but rather as a comforting and safe experience of fairy tale and myth: "Welcome to the magical land to the land of Merlin, to the land of Wagner" (ECV 98).³⁵⁸ Vivier himself explicitly acknowledged the importance of childhood and its frequent dreamlike imagery in the opera's composition: "The poetics of *KOPERNIKUS* stem at the same time from the lively sensibility [*sensibilité*] of the composer, from his relation with his childhood and from the different levels of the articulation of these diverse oneiric elements" (ECV 97).³⁵⁹ In this sense, then, something like "the old Alice" still persists within the final version of *Kopernikus*, at its intersections of death and the phantastical.³⁶⁰

mark the sections of the piece and in doing so creates a kind of ritualistic space within it (see Gilmore, "Lonely Child" 13). Elsewhere, in a 1976 text called "Japon" (ECV 68), Vivier explicitly acknowledged the influence of Kabuki theater on his dramatic compositions; he values Kabuki for its "presentation ceremony" (ECV 69) and its "[f]ormalisation of the dramatic art" (ECV 68). Tremblay ("L'écriture à haute voix" 48) also discusses *Lonely Child* as a ritual, and Ligeti describes the importance of ritual in Vivier vis-à-vis Stravinsky. See also Goldman 216-217, and Gilutz 103.

³⁵⁵ I will use "she" here, because of the gendered hints given in Vivier's French-language libretto, but the ambiguity of the gender of this character is also worth noting. The Hindu god Agni, for instance, is represented as male, but the role of the same name in *Kopernikus* is sung by a female alto. But, then again, Vivier explicitly described Agni as an autobiographical figure: "Agni c'est moi" (qtd. in Bail, "Introduction à *Kopernikus*" 12; see also Gilmore, CV 153).

³⁵⁶ Translation of: "la mélodie de la mort t'envahira très lentement mon amie. Bienvenue au pays silencieux."

³⁵⁷ Translation of: "N'aie pas peur ce sera doux comme une maman, la mort."

³⁵⁸ Translation of: "Bienvenue au pays magique au pays de Merlin, au pays de Wagner." There is significant overlap between Vivier and Wagner with regard to this understanding of life and death. See below.

³⁵⁹ Translation of: "La poétique de *KOPERNIKUS* tient à la fois de la vive sensibilité du compositeur, de son rapport avec son enfance et des différents niveaux d'articulation de ces divers éléments oniriques."

³⁶⁰ The opera in fact opens with a direct quotation (in French) of a letter written by Lewis Carroll, spoken by a Baritone (instructions in the score read "spoken in writing a letter!"): "Surely your gladness need not be the less

But besides the presentation of these more general motifs on Agni's journey into death, the opera has effectively no plot. Its narrative seems to hover, as Bail characterizes it, in a chasm opened up between its thematic explorations of childhood, phantasy, and dying: "[b]etween the numinous and the marvelous, sacrifice and ecstasy, existence and the work, is situated a void that he turns to music to fill" ("Introduction à *Kopernikus*" 9).³⁶¹ The "[u]niverse of *Kopernikus* is a bottomless pit," Bail writes ("Introduction à *Kopernikus*" 24).³⁶² In this regard, Vivier himself explicitly remarked that, in *Kopernikus*, "[t]here is no story, properly speaking, but a sequence of scenes developing Agni toward total purification and enabling her to reach the state of pure spirit" (ECV 95).³⁶³ Elsewhere, in a 1981 interview with Daniel Carrière—published in a now-defunct queer Montréalais publication called *La Berdache*—Vivier further commented on how he had approached such a lack of narrative, suspended between death and phantasy, as an explicitly anti-patriarchal mode of theatrical representation:

If I take for instance the opera *Kopernicus* [*sic*], which is a typical example, there are those who would reproach me for my lack of dramatic action in *Kopernicus*. These people are always expecting to have a battle between A and B, they are always expecting to have a good then a bad... good *whatever* bad *whatever*, some conflict, a situation of

for the thought that you will one day see a brighter dawn than this—when lovelier sights will meet your eyes than any waving trees or rippling waters—when angel-hands shall undraw your curtains, and sweeter tones than ever loving Mother breathed shall wake you to a new and glorious day—and when all the sadness, and the sin, that darkened life on this little earth, shall be forgotten like the dreams of a night that is past! / Your affectionate friend, / Lewis Carroll [*Et ta joie ne doit pas être la moindre à la pensée qu'un jour tu verras poindre une aube plus heureuse sur tes matins—quand, à tes yeux, s'offriront des visions plus adorables que celles du jeu du vent dans les arbres ou de l'eau d'un ruisseau dans la forêt. Quand, sur le jour nouveau et magnifique, des mains d'anges tireront les rideaux et qu'une tendre mélodie, d'une douceur jamais murmurée encore par une mère aimante, t'éveillera—et quand toute la tristesse, et le mal, qui noircirent la vie sur cette petite terre, seront oubliés, comme les rêves d'une nuit passée. / ton ami affectueux, / Lewis Carroll*] (*Kopernikus*, 9).

³⁶¹ Translation of: "Entre le numineux et le merveilleux, le sacrifice et l'extase, l'existence et l'oeuvre, s'installe un vide qu'il reviendra à la musique de combler."

³⁶² Translation of: "L'Univers de *Kopernikus* est un puits sans fond."

³⁶³ Translation of: "Il n'y a pas à proprement parler d'histoire, mais une suite de scènes faisant évoluer Agni vers la purification totale et lui faisant atteindre l'état de pur esprit."

dominated and dominating. Myself, at the very basis of *Kopernicus*, I wanted to have absolutely no conflict. In this sense, beginning with *Kopernicus*, I started to discover a type of sensibility [*sensibilité*] that I would like to express and that is very, very particular. [...] The speech of man, such as it has arisen in Western civilization, is a speech that obliges us to be strong, large, domineering, that obliges music to have a goal, that obliges opera to have conflicts, to stage the Universal. This is what is completely called into question at the level of sensibility. Presently we are living through an enormous, extremely profound crisis of civilization posed in terms that feminists like Annie Leclerc have discovered in a quite brilliant fashion. Since the Greeks, one is obliged to live with the complex of the chauvinist in works of art (*Le Berdache* 31-32).³⁶⁴

In *Kopernikus*, Vivier thus deliberately flouts a traditional operatic or theatrical logic according to which conflicts are presented in order to be resolved by a particular brand of Western masculine subjectivity. *Siegfried* comes to mind, for example. As opposed to this picture of traditional operatic narrative development, then, Vivier cycles through a number of characters—Merlin, Mozart, Copernicus, Lewis Carroll, Carabosse (the wicked fairy queen from *Snow White*), Mozart's Queen of the Night, an old monk, a blind prophet, etc.—each of whose identities are never quite established (even in the libretto, which only labels parts by voice

³⁶⁴ Translation of: "Si je prends par exemple l'opéra *Kopernicus* [sic], qui est un exemple typique, y'a des gens qui m'ont reproché mon manque d'action dramatique dans *Kopernicus*. Ces gens-là s'attendent toujours à avoir une bataille entre A et B, ils s'attendent toujours à avoir un bon pi un méchant... whatever bon whatever méchant, un conflit quelconque, une situation de dominé et de dominant. Moi, à la base même de *Kopernicus* je ne voulais absolument pas avoir de conflit. Dans ce sens-là, c'est à partir de *Kopernicus* que j'ai commencé à découvrir un type de sensibilité que je voulais exprimer qui était très très particulier. [...] La parole d'homme, telle qu'elle nous est posée dans la civilisation occidentale, c'est une parole qui nous oblige à être fort, grand, dominateur, qui oblige la musique à avoir un but, qui oblige l'opéra à avoir des conflits, à mettre en scène l'Universel. C'est ça qui au niveau de la sensibilité est complètement remis en question. Actuellement ce qu'on vit c'est une énorme crise de civilisation, extrêmement profonde et qui se pose dans des termes que les féministes comme Annie Leclerc ont découvert d'une façon très brillant. Depuis les grecs, on est obligé de vivre avec le complexe du machiste dans les oeuvres d'art."

type),³⁶⁵ each disappearing as quickly as they appear, which is only for a moment, in order to address Agni at the threshold of death, ushering her into the beyond.

Even Tristan and Isolde briefly show up. And indeed, as I have already begun to suggest, *Kopernikus* is saturated with a certain Wagnerism—though one voided of the latter’s dramatic climaxes. Bail thus writes, for instance, that “*Kopernikus* sails in eternity, like a certain other *Flying Dutchman*” (19).³⁶⁶ Gilutz, for his part, describes a more concrete Wagnerian influence on Vivier’s opera (152-154), pointing toward its emphasis on brass instruments as well as the use that Vivier makes, beginning at rehearsal number (reh.) 9, of “oscillating” (Gilutz 154) triads with added dissonant intervals, so as to produce the kind of chromaticism and harmonic ambiguity for which Wagner was famous (Gilutz makes a comparison with a specific progression found in *Parsifal* to illustrate his point (ibid.)). Even Gyorgy Ligeti, in a unique interview dedicated to his generally high opinions of Vivier’s music, speaks of the latter’s “super-wagnérisme” (8), and describes how “without being German, he has a pathetic aspect, though of a Latin pathos, and a lack of humor as with Wagner” (14).³⁶⁷ Like Wagner, then, in Ligeti’s view, Vivier humorlessly sought the purity and solace that were ultimately denied to him.³⁶⁸ Unlike Wagner, however, the world he created in this opera is one shorn of dramatic conflict, lacking narrative development, and indeed seeming to barely move at all.

³⁶⁵ The opera’s score does not formally label its characters, but lets their presence be inferred instead, ambiguously, from context. Without a prior knowledge of the opera and a careful attention to its performance, however, it is often difficult to tell who is singing at any given point.

³⁶⁶ Translation of: “*Kopernikus* navigue dans l’éternité, comme un certain autre *Vaisseau fantôme*.”

³⁶⁷ Translation of: “sans être allemand, il a un aspect pathétique, d’un pathos latin toutefois, et un manque d’humour comme chez Wagner.”

³⁶⁸ Vivier is also very much like Jean-Jacques Rousseau in this regard, and in fact Bail has described Vivier’s creation of a mythical time as the production of an “âge d’or,” in a way that inevitably recalls Rousseau to mind (though she does not mention him by name). She writes: “The musical production of Vivier is an imagistic representation of mythical time, of the ideal land of a golden age. This ideal land is a place that we can only imagine, since it is not situated on any of the maps of our world and goes back to an archetypal time. This place is nowhere, it is a place of bliss. [...] It is a primordial moment when gods and men share the same world in a symbiosis that haunts our imaginary, as a mythic time of happiness. It is called a golden age [*La production musicale de Vivier est une*

Such a lack of development is inscribed within Vivier's music as well—for instance, just before reh. 20, when a coloratura soprano sings the lines “we are pilgrims of the timeless [*nous sommes les pèlerins de l'intemporel*]” (ECV 100) in a rather haunting hexachordal phrase:

Figure 9. Claude Vivier, *Kopernikus*, p. 24

The musical score for Figure 9 shows a vocal line for Coloratura Soprano (Col.) and instrumental lines for Baritone (Bar. M.), Baritone (Bar.), Bass (Basse), and Trombone (Trb.). The vocal line is in G major, starting on G4, and features a hexachordal phrase. The instrumental lines are in G major, with the Baritone (Bar.) and Bass (Basse) lines marked 'p' and 'resp. ad lib.'.

Kopernikus by Claude Vivier

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représentation à l'image des temps mythiques, du pays idéal de l'Âge d'or. Le pays idéal est un lieu que nous ne pouvons qu'imaginer, parce qu'il ne se situe sur aucune des cartes de notre monde et qu'il remonte à des temps archétypaux. C'est un lieu de nulle part, le lieu de la félicité. [...] C'est un moment primordial, où les dieux et les hommes partagent le même monde en une symbiose qui hante notre imaginaire, c'est le temps mythique du bonheur. On l'appelle l'Âge d'or" (Bail 11). This connection with the eighteenth-century is not entirely out of place, given that Vivier was also explicitly influenced by the role of myth and the *merveilleux* in pre-Mozartian Baroque opera. For instance, he wrote that "[...] what interests me a lot comes before Mozart, this whole period from Monteverdi to Gluck, when opera hadn't completely taken on its letters of nobility, when the dramatic action was not inexistent but not quite existing—it resembled the theater at the time, for which it was always the gods who appeared on stage—Mozart effectively interrupted this staging and replaced these gods with human beings. [...] Today, we can no longer think opera in this fashion. It's impossible: we no longer have this 'mythicality' in us. What I am searching for in an opera is also a state, a state of being *opera* that doesn't necessarily use a theatrico-dramatic action, a story, but that makes use of the theater as a majestic stall for a state of being [...ce qui m'intéresse beaucoup, c'est avant Mozart, toute cette période de Monteverdi jusqu'à Gluck, où est-ce que l'opéra n'a pas acquis complètement ses lettres de noblesse, où est-ce que l'action dramatique n'était pas inexistante mais presque pas existante—elle ressemblait beaucoup au théâtre de l'époque où est-ce que c'était toujours des dieux qui était mis en scène—Mozart a effectivement coupé cette mise en scène pour les remplacer par des êtres humains. [...] Transposé aujourd'hui, on ne peut pas penser l'opéra de cette façons-là. C'est impossible : on n'a plus cette « mythicité » en nous. Ce que je recherche dans un opéra, c'est aussi un état, un état d'être opera et qui n'utilise pas nécessairement une action dramatique théâtrale, une histoire, mais qui se sert du théâtre comme étal majestueux d'état d'être...]" (Vivier, qtd. in Bail, "Introduction à *Kopernikus* 25).

This harmonically ambiguous passage itself seems to pilgrim between the implication of G minor and B minor triads³⁶⁹—a tendency that begins earlier in the opera, as Gilutz notes (in his comparison with *Parsifal*)—moving without progressing, in an indeterminacy to which the baritone, bass, and trombone lines seem to contribute as well. Moreover, it is rather remarkably written over the space of 34 crotchets, undivided in a single measure, and in this way suggests a kind of unbroken synchronism or atemporality already within the opera’s score.

Vivier thus confronts his audience with a quasi-ritualistic descent into what Yeats in “Sailing to Byzantium” called the “artifice of eternity”—one in which death intermingles with the phantastical. Such a subversion of the temporality of traditional narrative is further echoed in Vivier’s persistent interruption of his own uses of *language*, with what he called his “langue inventée.” He had already employed this technique before using it in *Kopernikus*—and it is in fact a relatively consistent feature throughout his oeuvre—though it is a noteworthy technique in this opera specifically, since it constitutes a further method through which he is able to displace any potential narrative development. Here is a short sample:

Na sal! na ka vo no-i se mè-u san na va zo-zé né vo yè né kè ne mo nou-a hic ta vo ne ta
vo ne ta vo ne ma zo sin zo ne ke zo ne ka na mo na ka to(m) la var no sa nâ po ne vo né
ki na-ou fè no nâ sa ma ru kous è-i hé fa lan to-ou-a agni to fo ne ha ha ha ha rous kiè
noy so to fa rè che vrosa fo na-i sa vo mo yo na (ECV 99).

One can recognize in this passage the name “agni,” to whom this generally monosyllabic nonsense language is addressed, but little else makes any sense. In the only article to date that examines this “language” in any depth, Bryan Christian identifies several angles from which one

³⁶⁹ As well as E ♭ minor, perhaps. The notes that Vivier uses here—F#, G, B ♭, B, D, E ♭—besides vaguely suggesting certain triadic relationships, also form three pairs of minor second intervals, for which Vivier had a proclivity and which he frequently repeated as another manner of producing a sense of inactivity (cf. Gilutz 150-151).

might understand its composition and functions within Vivier's work, suggesting that it might be considered in relation to sound poetry, glossolalia, Hildegard von Bingen's *lingua ignota*, or the "grammelot" used in *commedia dell'arte* and mime.³⁷⁰ Referencing another of Vivier's works, *Prologue pour un Marco Polo*, Christian also explores how Vivier deliberately deployed this idiomatic "speech" in order to evoke the sense of hearing an unknown language for the first time—an approach that, Christian argues, would have been especially influenced by Vivier's experiences travelling to Bali, Java, Singapore, Japan, Egypt, and Iran in the mid-1970s (18). Beyond these more general influences, however, Christian and Gilmore both note that Vivier most explicitly approached the composition of this *langue inventée* as a form of "automatic writing," such as the French surrealists developed early in the twentieth century. As Vivier himself described it, "[a]ll this language came from automatic writing. I have always invented my own language" (qtd. in Gilmore CV 154). This is to say that, although his *langue inventée* often mimics real languages, even to the point of occasionally borrowing words from them,³⁷¹ it is ultimately not intended to signify, in any strong sense of the term, but instead—if one is to take the comparison with automatic writing seriously—to transcribe a certain relationship to the unconscious.³⁷² With this in mind, one could further note the way in which Vivier's *langue inventée* also mimics the inarticulateness of a certain Freudo-Lyotardian *enfance*, which would come to interrupt the articulate phrases otherwise used by his characters on stage.

³⁷⁰ Christian's central thesis in this essay is that the notion of "grammelot" is a particularly helpful paradigm through which to understand Vivier's *langue inventée*.

³⁷¹ Occasionally (though rarely), words do appear to be embedded within Vivier's invented language, such as the Balinese "dewa" (gods) (ECV 98), as well as the French "chut" (ECV 99) and "zéro" (ibid.); or, in *Lonely Child*, the ancient Egyptian notion of "ka" (ECV 109).

³⁷² Drawing on Vivier's notes and manuscripts housed at the Université de Montréal archives, Christian helpfully describes the two-stage process of automatic writing and systematic revision that Vivier used to compose his *langue inventée*: "the first stage is the automatic writing, or typing [...] of the text, and the second is the automatic fragmenting and reworking of the text" (23).

In *Kopernikus*, this *langue inventée* becomes the effective mother tongue for the dreams of death and childhood phantasy that the opera thematically traces out in its (lack of) plot. In this sense, the Canadian stage director Marthe Forget observed how Agni is gradually initiated into the invented language as the opera unfolds: “this esoteric language is only used by the insiders. When they speak to Agni, who is not yet an insider, the language becomes comprehensible again. But gradually, as she [Agni] advances in her initiation, she enters more and more into this playing with the ‘langue inventée’” (Forget, qtd. in Gilmore, CV 154). Little by little, then, these nonsense syllables come to permeate the “narrative” of Agni’s journey toward death, until the opera ends in a long and repetitive list of the names of stars that then also fragments into *langue inventée*, dissolving even the names of the heavens beyond recognition.³⁷³ Such a gesture seems to recall, in a way that is almost certainly deliberate on Vivier’s part, Dante’s journey beyond the firmament in his *Paradiso*, through the *primum mobile* to the rose of God’s love, the ultimate eternal presence out of which the world emanates—“l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle” (Dante 408)—except, obviously, for the fact that Dante is able to emerge from his journey intact: he experiences the ultimate plenitude of God and then returns to life, whereas Agni’s journey necessarily entails her destruction.³⁷⁴ In this sense, *Kopernikus* constellates themes of infancy and eternity, phantasy and death around a single, rather simple equation, already recognized by

³⁷³ Here are the last lines of the opera, as reproduced in the *Circuit* publication of Vivier’s *Écrits*: “sadir sadir sadir sadir sadir sadir nihali cih nihali cih cih nihali ci nihali cih nihali cih nihali cih Pro cy on Pro cy on Pro cy on procy on Pro cy on Pro cy on Vegas Vega [vega vega] [vega] / antares antares antares [etc.] azel fafayè azel fafayè bellatrix eus pella ca no pus eus tor pollux caph belletrix cu rigel Pulcherrima Pulcherrima [etc.] / deneb deneb deneb [etc.] de ru ti li eus ru ti li eus ru ti li eus ru ti li eus ru ti li eus ru A chie nar al rai aidera min nar al rai mé ro pe Pulcherrima Pulcherrima [etc.] / na-o souls snè krou se-u katch tre kou wè a ro si trou yeu so-i kiè cho dou sel si kio / Ko-per-ni-kus Ko-per-ni-kus / so-i kè la mou yè ke yo kè no rè ka wa ra wa kè yo ro ka-o-ou ya pè kè la sa veu ka ma ko ka yo ma tcha ro dol kabir ne ji yo do rè kou wa sa yo ka na-ou si rè to mè-i / ko ro sa mi so yo dja kè do sa la yè mi zè go na ka yok sal yo kè dja fa tchè ka yo sou-a wa ka-ou ji yo ta ya ka mo lou kè ya ma sa yo ka-na-ou do ka to mè-i / sa ya ko né ni so kè ra ma-i ka yo no rè ji-o tar ras se yo kè ma so la” (ECV 107). The last two syllables also seem to gesture toward a certain solfège.

³⁷⁴ Mallarmé also, in an 1867 letter to Eugène Lefébure, described his desire “to advance more deeply into the sensation of Absolute Shadows [*d’avancer plus profondément dans la sensation des Ténèbres Absolues*],” writing that “destruction was my Beatrice [*destruction fut ma Béatrice*]” (Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, v. 1, 717).

figures like Freud or Bataille: unity means annihilation.³⁷⁵ To recover one's origin means to lose or destroy one's ego.³⁷⁶ Taking this central aporetic aspect of the opera into account, then, Vivier's deployment of themes of childhood and oneirism can be understood to have been *a priori* circumscribed by the death into which they lead—and this is precisely what would prevent his opera from being understood in terms of any simple sentimentality or Romantic nostalgia. In *Kopernikus*, in other words, one never quite gets back to the phantom solace of a lost childhood, which haunts the subject as its unconscious limit and its annihilation.

3. *Lonely Child*

The themes that permeate *Kopernikus*—childhood, eternity, phantasy, unity, death—are not limited to this opera, and recur elsewhere in Vivier's work. Most famously, around the same time (debuting only months before *Kopernikus*, in March 1980), Vivier also took up these themes in another, shorter piece for soprano and chamber orchestra, to which he gave the English title *Lonely Child*. The piece was dedicated to Louise André, a professor of voice at the Université de Montréal with whom Vivier had consulted for *Kopernikus* (Véronique Robert, in Vivier, ECV 108, fn. 2); and even two or three of the opera's characters—Merlin, Carabosse, and potentially the Queen of the Night—reappear in the short text for *Lonely Child* (which Vivier also wrote).³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Vivier mentions psychoanalysis in multiple places throughout his writing, and cites Bataille (alongside Dante and Mozart) as one of the three major influences for one of the operas he was planning at the time of his death. It may be therefore reasonable to assume that these figures might have had some amount of influence on this tendency toward the equation of unity and dissolution in Vivier's dramatic works. One would also be tempted to cite Antonin Artaud in this regard, who also shows up in multiple places in Vivier's writing.

³⁷⁶ Consider also Leo Bersani's more explicitly queer approach to this idea (as influenced by Bataille) in "Is the Rectum a Grave?," in which he describes a "self-shattering."

³⁷⁷ Here is the full text of *Lonely Child*, as it appears in the *Circuit* publication of Vivier's *Écrits*: "O bel en-fant de la lumière dors dors dors toujours dors les rê-ves viendront les dou-ces fées viendront danser a-vec toi merveille les fées et les el-fes te fê-te-ront la fa-ran-do-le joyeuse t'enivrera A-mi dors mon enfant ou-vrez-vous portes de di-a-mant Pa-lais somp-tueux mon enfant les hi-ron-delles guideront tes pas / Ka rè nou ya zo na-ou de wa ki [na no ni] eu dou-a dors mon en — fant [da do dii] yo (r)-zu-i yo a-e-i da ge da ge da è-i-ou da ge da ge ou-a-è da gè da dou de da gè da gè na-ou-è ka [ja de] — do ya s(r?)ou se ma yo rè-s tè dè-i-a wè [na no ni] no wi i-è ka / Les é-toi-les

But whereas *Kopernikus* presents a somewhat more oblique relationship to childhood, by way of its fairy-tale world, *Lonely Child* thematizes it in a much more direct way—both in its title and in the fact that its text is largely addressed to a child. The piece thus begins with the words “O bel enfant de la lumière,” in a potential allusion to the “Bella figlia dell’amore” quartet of Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. *Lonely Child*’s initial address to a “bel enfant” would in this sense signal that its child will have been, like Gilda, cursed from the beginning.

Despite its title and the bad portent with which it opens, however, *Lonely Child* is, like *Kopernikus*, also largely filled with comforting, dreamlike imagery. The initially nameless child is consoled with hyper-sentimental, Neverland-esque promises that, for instance, “dreams will come sweet fairies will come dance with you [*les rêves viendront les douces fées viendront danser avec toi*],” and “the stars in the sky shine for you [*les étoiles au ciel brillent pour toi*].” With this in mind, Gilmore notes how “almost everyone” assumes the eponymous child to represent Vivier himself, who would be thus consoling himself with another fairy tale from the position of the parents that he never had (CV 169; see also Christian 15). Certainly, there must be a degree of truth in such an interpretation; though it would be also important to acknowledge that this child is not exactly offered comfort, but is again ushered into something like death—into sleep, intoxication, or eternity—where they will remain “lonely,” or will at best no longer be lonely because they will no longer be. Indeed, Vivier himself described this work not as consolatory but as “a long song of solitude” (ECV 108). *Lonely Child*’s apparent figures of

font des bonds prodi-gieux dans l'es-pa-ce temps dimensions zébrées de couleurs douces les temps en parabole discutent de Merlin les magiciens merveilleux embras-sent le soleil d'or les a-crobates tou-chent du nez les é-toi-les pas trop sages les jar-dins font rêver aux moi-nes mauves rê-ves d'enfant don-nez-moi la main et allons voir la fée Carrabosse son palais de ja-de sis au milieu des morceaux de rêves oubli-és dé-jà. Flotte é-temellement ô reine des aubes bleues donne-moi s'il te plaît l'éternité ô! Reine / Ko rè noy Ta zio ko rè ko rè Ta zio Ta zio Ta zio ko rè noy na — ou ya sin kè / l'héli-an-the douce dirige vers les é-toiles l'éner-gie su-bli-me Ta zio la lan-gue des fées te parle-ra et tu ver-ras l'a-mour Ta zio tendrement tes yeux verts puiseront dans les lambeaux de cont' surannés Pour créer un vrai le tien Ta zio don-ne-moi la main Ta zio Ta zio / Et l'espoir du temps du temps Hors temps appa-raît mon enfant les é-toi-les au ciel bril-lent pour toi Ta-zio et t'aiment éternellement Ka” (ECV 108-109).

solace in this way do not offer reconciliation, but only the further abandonment of its child within a dream of death.

If *Lonely Child* does—and it certainly does—involve an autobiographical (or, rather, autothanatographical) element, its depiction of childhood nevertheless also certainly exceeds any simple commentary on or lament for Vivier’s life in particular. That the piece’s problematic is more general is hinted at, for instance, toward end of its text, when the name of its initially anonymous child finally appears—not as Claude but as “Tazio.”³⁷⁸ This name, as Gilmore has already suggested (CV 169; also “Lonely Child” 16), is a likely reference to the “Tadzio” of Mann’s *Death in Venice*, which tells the story of a middle-aged aesthete writer, Gustav von Aschenbach, who, in search of inspiration, decides to spend some time in Venice—where he slowly develops a pederastic and voyeuristic obsession with a fourteen-year-old Venetian adolescent boy before falling into a hallucinatory stupor and dying in a beach chair, presumably of cholera. Mann’s deranged and hauntingly beautiful narrative describes a man guided by a hyperbolized classical Grecian sense of ideal beauty, through which he justifies an erotic desire that he at first disguises from himself as an interest in aesthetics: the story chronicles how this supposedly pure, Apollonian aesthetic sensibility slowly degenerates into a Dionysian passion that ultimately consumes him. As this deterioration of his inner state occurs, the exterior space of Venice is also slowly consumed by a plague of cholera, which—as an objective correlative of his repressed desire—the locals attempt to keep hidden from him. By the end of Mann’s story, Aschenbach has become entirely possessed by Tadzio, stalking him through a city overtaken by death and decay, collapsing under the stagnant heat of an eternal summer sun. Gilmore observes that Vivier’s choice to borrow a version of Tadzio’s name for *Lonely Child* might suggest the

³⁷⁸ As demonstrated in *Glaubst du an die Unsterblichkeit der Seele?*, for instance, Vivier did not have a problem inserting himself into his work, and might have done so here had he wanted to.

presence of sexuality beyond or beside the filial relationship outwardly described in his text: “what had seemed at the outset like the love of a mother for her child can now be understood as love of a sexual, perhaps homoerotic, kind” (ibid.). Building on Gilmore’s observation (which is made only very briefly), one might go on to suggest that, in a sort of inversion of Aschenbach’s trajectory in Mann’s novella, which moves from artistic imagination to erotic transfixion, *Lonely Child* instead moves from an at least libidinal fixation on childhood—as a polymorphously perverse *âge d’or* of possibility and plenitude, the *nachträglich* phantasy of a time before the intrusion of the (hetero)normalizing developmental narratives of adulthood (which was itself interrupted, in Vivier’s case, by his abandonment as an infant, by his homosexuality, by the rape by his adoptive uncle, etc.)—toward the reinscription of this idea of childhood (or its never having existed) within an artistic imaginary.

Tazio is not, however, the only lonely child presented in this work. Another name appears alongside his—alternating with it, though slightly more inconspicuously, indistinctly taking shape somewhere between the nonsense syllables of Vivier’s *langue inventée* and the presentation of a proper name: “ko rè.” Kore is of course an alternative name for the ancient Greek goddess of the underworld, Persephone, who was herself also stolen away from her family and violated. After having been abducted, she presided, with Hades, over the underworld and the souls of the damned, and came to serve in Greek mythology as a point of transformation between death and rebirth (since she is also the cause of spring, when she leaves the underworld and returns to her mother, Demeter, on earth). Moreover, the word κόρη can also mean “maiden;” and, through this more general meaning, the word also came to be used to designate a certain style of archaic Greek sculpture that portrays young female figures. These figures are famously hieratic, somewhat rigid and generally emotionless—except sometimes for the presence of an

enigmatic smile, reminiscent of that for which Mallarmé and Pater so admired the Mona Lisa. In this sense, the figure of Kore in *Lonely Child* might provide yet another link between childhood and death, confronting its phantasy of origin and immediacy with the enigmatic smile of a cold statue that knows this phantasy to be impossible, that knows such infantile immediacies to have been always already spirited away across the Lethe, lost to life and art and conscious memory.

As in parts of *Kopernikus*, but even more explicitly, this staging of a time of plenitude and its failed recovery is also presented musically—here according to an ingenious compositional technique that Vivier employed first in *Lonely Child*, but which he would go on to use in several other works. He sometimes described this technique in terms of “couleurs,” or elsewhere he more straightforwardly described it as “the addition of frequencies” (it has also been called “dyadic instrumental additive synthesis,” the “‘sum and difference’ principle of chord generation,” or composition with “combination tones”³⁷⁹). This practice cemented Vivier’s identity as a so-called “spectralist” composer, though it did not arise in isolation: Gilmore has explored it, for instance, in relation to Vivier’s contemporaries like Tristan Murail (*Ethers*), as well as Olivier Messiaen’s so-called “chord of resonance,” and in relation especially to Karlheinz Stockhausen’s use of ring modulation on piano in *Mantra*.³⁸⁰ Describing Stockhausen’s piece, Gilmore writes:

[Electronic ring modulation] takes two signals as input and produces a signal containing the sum and difference of their respective frequencies. If, for example, the inputs are two sine waves of 200 Hz and 300 Hz, the output from the ring modulator will be two frequencies of 500 Hz (300 Hz + 200 Hz) and 100 Hz (300 Hz – 200 Hz)—the sum and difference tones respectively. If richer waveforms than sine tones are used as input (in

³⁷⁹ See Gilmore, CV 163, “Lonely Child” 5; Goldman 218.

³⁸⁰ See Gilmore CV 163-168.

Mantra, the sound of the grand pianos) then the output signals from the ring modulator may be very complex; not infrequently the resulting sounds are like bells of various metallic sounds (“Lonely Child” 5).

Ring modulation, in other words, can take the complex sound of tones produced by musical instruments in accordance with the harmonic series, and, by combining them in this way, produce inharmonic, metallic-sounding timbres in their place (Gilmore, *ibid.*). One might recall here Bernoulli’s experiments with inharmonic partials in metal rods (as discussed in Chapter 1).³⁸¹ Vivier, with his “addition des frequences,” analogically mimics this electronic effect in his composition. To do so, he begins with a two-part melody, and effectively ring modulates its two parts against one another, calculating their sum tones and then scoring these progressively higher tones pseudo-harmonically with the initial pairing. Each instrument would act as a kind of overtone in the production of a single orchestral timbre, according to a mechanism guided by an artificial and unnatural harmonic series. Gilmore goes on to explain in more detail how this additive technique informs the composition of *Lonely Child*, taking as an example the calculations that underpin mm. 24-28, through which Vivier derives a set of tones out of an initial pairing of G and A, each of which he then distributes among a *divisi* first violin section:

The A of the soprano, 440 Hz, and the G of the second horn and cellos, 196 Hz, when ‘ring-modulated’, produce the combination tone of 636 Hz ($a + b$), a pitch somewhere between the equal-tempered D# and E (622 Hz and 659 Hz respectively); Vivier notates it as an E with a downward-pointing arrow before it, indicating a quartertone lower. The resulting pitch is played by the fifth of the six first violins. Then the process continues: the new pitch, E a quartertone lower, is itself ring-modulated against the original G: 636

³⁸¹ Gilmore (CV 164) even suggests that spectral music might trace its origins back to Jean-Philippe Rameau in the eighteenth century. In this regard, one could fruitfully juxtapose Vivier’s explorations of timbre with the naturalizing tendencies that underlie Rameau’s theory of the *corps sonore*, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Hz plus 196 Hz gives the combination tone of 832 Hz ($a + 2b$), almost exactly a tempered G# (which is 830.6 Hz); this pitch is taken by player four of the first violins. This new note is in turn ring modulated against the G: 832 Hz plus 196 Hz gives 1028 Hz ($a + 3b$), a bit lower than the tempered C (1047 Hz) although not as low as the quartertone below it (1017 Hz); Vivier thus writes the note C without any inflection. This C is played by the third first violin. And so the process continues, with two more, still higher, combination tones. The total of five combination tones, played together, make up the '*couleur*'—the spectral harmony—of the generative model G-A (196 Hz-440 Hz) ("On Claude Vivier's 'Lonely Child'," 8).

Each of the new notes that Vivier calculates is assigned to a different instrument (each of the violins in this case), but they are all played in unison, producing a single monophonic texture or *couleur*. Thus, from what is initially a *single interval*, Vivier produces a strange, haunting orchestral timbre using only traditional acoustic instruments.³⁸²

In an interview with Radio-Canada, Vivier described this technique in terms of the "intervalized [*intervalisée*]" melodies that it produces.³⁸³ Such a qualifier is perhaps significant here, inasmuch as it suggests that Vivier first prioritized not tones but intervals themselves—the gaps, caesurae or lacunae between the notes. It suggests, in other words, that the musical textures produced by Vivier's technique are not first the positive presentation or representation of an emotional or ideational content that would be conveyed by them, but rather expansions of the

³⁸² Goldman has labelled these textures Vivier's "timbre-harmony" (216), since they are neither quite the one, nor quite the other. Vivier himself wrote, in a similar vein, that "[t]here are no more chords, then, and the whole orchestral mass finds itself transformed into one timbre [*il n'y a donc plus d'accords et toute la masse orchestrale se trouve alors transformé en un timbre*]" (ECV 108). The troubling of the musical distinction between timbre and harmony in general was one of the major accomplishments of spectralism.

³⁸³ Vivier: "I would like to arrive at a quite homophonic music that would transform itself into a single melody that would be 'intervalised' [*Je voulais en arriver à une musique très homophonique qui se transformerait en une seule mélodie, laquelle mélodie serait « intervalisée »*]" (ECV 108).

silent, spectral distances or differences that exist within the timbre of any complex sound, through which the possibility of music itself is constituted: one might speculate, then, that this approach to composition deliberately places a structural absence at the very heart of Vivier's potential for musical expression. Deploying these *couleurs* alongside its literary allusions, *Lonely Child* explores not only Vivier's biographical abandonments and his uncanny relationship to a childhood that never was: it also inscribes such absences within the technical basis of its music—such that its very sound becomes a kind of echo or specter, of an infinitely opening Eleatic distance within the space of a single interval³⁸⁴—as much between two tones as between absent mother and abandoned child.

4. Sexuality and Absence

In ways that now have been at least outlined, both *Kopernikus* and *Lonely Child* can be said to have explored the loss of an infantile origin alongside the painful and vain quest for its recovery. In each case, with varying degrees of explicitness, this quest is figured by Vivier at the intersection of themes of childhood, phantasy, and death. But the role that sexuality *in general* might play in Vivier's work—aside from what has been said above with regard to his queer childhood—remains to be explored here. That is to ask, finally, and by way of conclusion: what does Vivier's queerness have to do with his music?³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴Vivier is reported to have made statements like “it's so vast, so infinite, what you can do with two notes” (qtd. in Gilmore 168).

³⁸⁵ One might begin to get a sense of the theoretical and artistic importance of sexuality for Vivier by turning to the contents of his library, which Gilutz helpfully summarizes at the beginning of his dissertation (1-8). After Gilmore's biography (CV 173), it was already documented that Vivier's library contained works by many important writers from European literary history—like Mann, Artaud, Marguerite Duras, Hermann Hesse, and Samuel Beckett—each of whom impacted his work in varying degrees. In addition, Gilmore points to the presence of theorists like Nicolas Ruwet and Jacques Attali on Vivier's bookshelf. Gilutz argues, however, that by drawing attention only to the presence of such authors, Gilmore more or less curates a specific lineage of Vivier's influences, which were in actuality much broader than his biography suggests. Gilutz thus goes on to describe the extent to which Vivier's shelves were also populated by a great number of queer authors, including Jean Genet, Marcel Proust, Walt

Although sexuality as such never seems to be foregrounded in his works, in his personal life Vivier was never shy about his queerness. Nor, on the other hand, was he shy about his struggle to accept it. For instance, in a 1978 piece titled “Introspection d’un compositeur,” he writes of the personal contradictions that he felt between his sexuality and his persistent attachment to religion, particularly Catholicism: “Still catholic, it is difficult for me to believe that I might be homosexual [*Encore catholique, il m’est difficile de croire que je sois homosexuel*]” (92). Despite this personal conflict, however, in his later 1981 *Le Berdache* interview (in which he discusses the anti-macho “plot” of *Kopernikus* cited above), Vivier also touted the significance of what he understood to be a particularly “gay” manner of expression (which he might have called “queer” only a decade later): this interview would thus at least seem to indicate that Vivier’s queerness was not simply an incidental factor of his biography, but that it instead had some level of influence on his art. As Vivier explains, however, such an influence would be difficult to pin down, for reasons that are nevertheless quite specific:

When I speak of a gay speech in this sense, gay speech as much as feminist speech are terms for returning an equal, undifferentiated weight to beings. For me, a gay speech completely calls into question a system of sensibility [*sensibilité*], whether it be homosexual or heterosexual. / It transposes the discourse to another level. It’s no longer important if my sexuality expresses itself in a homosexual fashion; one has to be able to get past [*dépasser*] that to discover things. Ex: I no longer pity myself for the fact that I’m a fag; in getting past that I discover things that the heterosexual, for whom sexuality is never put into question has neither the occasion nor the opportunity to encounter

Whitman, Oscar Wilde, Jean Cocteau, James Baldwin, Yves Navarre, Pierre Jean-Jouve, Allen Ginsberg, T.H. White, Lord Byron, and Anaïs Nin, as well as Québécois writers like Madeleine Gagnon, Michel Tremblay and Paul Chamberland (with whom Vivier collaborated). Alongside texts by these authors, one can find interviews with the director Pier-Paolo Pasolini, as well as writing by certain queer theorists (if not “queer theorists”) like Roland Barthes (whom Gilmore does mention) and Susan Sontag.

[*revoir*]. This even makes it possible for certain heterosexuals today to encounter their sexuality, and in this sense there is a gay current that touches as much heterosexuals as homosexuals (*Le Berdache* 32).³⁸⁶

Here Vivier articulates an idiomatic understanding of the relationship between queerness and art, according to which the former would not be simply expressed through the latter in terms of any straightforward notion of sexual identity: rather, Vivier figures his “gay” (read: “queer”) sexuality in terms of an excess or *dépassement* that would be reducible neither to either hetero- nor to homo-sexuality.

To begin to clarify this complicated and irreducible excess in Vivier’s artistic practice—of sexuality vis-à-vis sexual identity—I will now turn briefly to the work of Lee Edelman, and specifically to his early essay called “Homographesis.” In this essay, Edelman perhaps similarly attempts to think through the moment when “homosexuality” becomes a readable designation, an inflection or even a “diacritical” mark (Edelman 4) that can be identified and interpreted in or on bodies and the relationships between them. He writes:

As soon as homosexuality is localized, and consequently can be read within the social landscape, it becomes subject to a metonymic dispersal that allows it to be read *into* almost anything. The field of sexuality [...] is not, then, merely bifurcated by the awareness of homosexual possibilities; it is not simply divided into the separate but unequal arenas of hetero- and homo-sexual relations. Instead, homosexuality comes to

³⁸⁶ Translation of: “Quand je parle d’une parole gaie dans ce sens-là, la parole gaie autant que la parole féministe sont des termes pour redonner aux êtres leur poids égal, sans différence. Pour moi une parole gaie remet complètement en question un système de sensibilité, qu’il soit homosexuel ou hétérosexuel. / Ca transpose le discours à un niveau plus élevé. Ce n’est plus important si ma sexualité s’exprime d’une façon homosexuelle, il faut être capable de dépasser ça pour découvrir des choses, ex: je ne m’apitoie plus sur le fait que je suis une tapette, en dépassant ça je découvre des choses que l’hétérosexuel, dont la sexualité n’est jamais remise en question n’a pas l’occasion ni l’opportunité de revoir. C’est ce qui fait que certains hétérosexuels aujourd’hui revoient même leur sexualité, dans ce sens-là y’a un courant gai qui touche autant les hétérosexuels que les homosexuels.”

signify the potential permeability of every sexual signifier—and by extension, of every signifier as such—by an ‘alien’ signification. Once sexuality may be read and interpreted in light of homosexuality, all sexuality is subject to a hermeneutics of suspicion (6-7). For Edelman, then, once sexuality begins to be read according to the normativizing ideals of heterosexuality, the signifiers or the “tropology” (9) that designate its opposite—homosexuality—begin to metonymically stand in for all “deviant” sexual practices and identities (a role that the signifier “queer” has perhaps taken over today). This metonymization then results in the subjection of all sexuality *in general* to a suspicious or paranoid³⁸⁷ hermeneutics, which either implicitly or explicitly ferrets out “homosexual” tendencies—whether in the name of direct persecution, or, more often and more insidiously, for the sake of the identification and classification of sexualities that can then be understood, controlled, and regulated (cf. Foucault).

For Edelman, the category of “homosexuality” therefore does not simply represent a single sexual identity, but rather comes to figure a more general “secondary, sterile, and parasitic form of social representation” (9): it becomes the representation of what would come to subvert and corrupt otherwise normal, natural expressions of (hetero)sexuality. In this sense, Edelman will argue that the signifier “homosexuality” takes on the same traits that the notion of writing does within the history of Western metaphysics from Plato onward, such as Derrida analyzed in *De la grammatologie*. This parasitic relationship—of a corrupting “homosexuality” to a proper, natural form of (hetero)sexual identity—is the first thing that Edelman means by his neologism “homographesis.”³⁸⁸ However, extending Derrida’s observations,³⁸⁹ Edelman then argues that if

³⁸⁷ Cf. Paul Ricoeur’s idea of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” in *Freud and Philosophy*; Melanie Klein’s notion of the “paranoid-schizoid position;” and Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You” (in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*).

³⁸⁸ Edelman: “[...] the ‘graphesis,’ the entry into writing, that ‘homographesis’ would hope to specify is not only one in which ‘homosexual identity’ is differentially conceptualized by a heterosexual culture as something legibly

homosexuality is indeed seen as an unnatural and *dangerous supplement* for a normal (hetero)sexuality, it will also and by the same token necessarily displace the supposedly self-enclosed, pure, and natural identity of this (hetero)sexuality, inasmuch as the latter would come to depend upon it in order to constitute itself.

This dependence, for Edelman, would be found in the heteronormative injunction to “*produce*, for purposes of ideological regulation, a putative difference within that group of male bodies that would otherwise count as ‘the same’” (10).³⁹⁰ In other words, the injunction to maintain distinct differences in “sexual orientation,” and to inscribe them upon bodies and behaviors, betrays the manner in which the supposed naturalness of heterosexuality in fact depends upon the expurgation of non-normative sexual categories that would otherwise inhere within it, but that it opposes to itself in order to produce its identity by voiding itself of what it posits as unnatural. The introduction of these distinctions within an otherwise more opaque understanding of sexuality then gives the lie for a supposedly corrupt queerness to proliferate and to come to infect what was supposed to be protected from it. “Homographesis” thus names for Edelman a double movement according to which homosexuality would stand in for both 1. the recuperation of (sexual) difference within forms of (sexual) identity, in categories like “gay” and “straight,” but at the same time, 2. the failure of these (sexual) identities to ever fully contain this (sexual) difference.³⁹¹

written on the body, but also one in which the meaning of ‘homosexual identity’ itself is determined through its assimilation to the position of writing within the tradition of Western metaphysics” (9).

³⁸⁹ Here I mean Derrida’s early observations in texts like *De la grammatologie*, with regard to the manner in which—to oversimplify—writing necessarily exceeds its traditional role as a graphic signifier of a sonic signifier, and instead intrudes upon the assumed interiority and self-presence of the “signified” supposedly contained in and represented by it (see also Bennington’s “Derridabase,” in *Jacques Derrida*).

³⁹⁰ Edelman, somewhat needlessly and unfortunately, seems to want to describe only *male* homosexual bodies in his essay.

³⁹¹ Edelman quite precisely describes this double movement in writing that homographesis “names, on the one hand, a normalizing practice of cultural discrimination (generating, as a response, the self-nomination that

This notion of homographesis, I think, helps to shed light on the problem of how one might understand the role of sexuality in Vivier's music—which would be reducible *neither* to the straightforward expression of Vivier's identity as a homosexual (“[i]t’s no longer important if my sexuality expresses itself in a homosexual fashion; one has to be able to get past that to discover things” (*Le Berdache* 32; cited above)), *nor* to any supposedly neutral and natural understanding of music, which would only repeat a de facto heterosexual model of expression that he equally wanted to surpass in his notion of a *parole gaie* (ibid.).³⁹² In conceptualizing the role of Vivier's sexuality in his work, then, it would be necessary to think of its effects without reducing them to these two mutually reinforcing alternatives—of either a presumed desexualized music or a simple musical expression of sexual identity. This is to say that it would be misleading to read Vivier's compositions as musical manifestations of his gayness: instead, it would be both possible and more accurate to claim that the queer aspects of Vivier's work manifest in the ruptures that it produces in the very conditions through which such a gayness would be assumed to be expressible in the first place—displacing the very economy of representation through which one would still hope to recover a pure, natural, personal and autobiographical essence, untouched by the perverted and parasitic forces of discourse or mediation or “graphesis” in general. According to this hypothesis, then, the various forms of absence and loss explored above (musically, linguistically, narrativistically), which otherwise might seem to have little to do with Vivier's queerness, are precisely the non-places or places of non-contact that one would need to look for it—not as an identity contained within them as an object hidden in a closet, but as what “completely calls into question a system of sensibility

eventuates in the affirmative politics of a minoritized gay community), and on the other, a strategic resistance to that reification of sexual difference” (10).

³⁹² In “Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet” (an essay in *Queering The Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*), Philip Brett demonstrates how the discipline of musicology has historically ignored or even suppressed certain relationships between homosexuality and music.

[*sensibilité*]” (Vivier, *Le Berdache* 32; cited above). In this sense, perhaps, Vivier’s relationship to his sexuality would be homographematically inscribed everywhere and nowhere in his work, at each moment when it rigorously corrupts the conditions of its own expression.

* * *

By examining motifs of childhood and death, or presence and absence in Vivier’s writing and music, this chapter attempted to demonstrate how Vivier’s childhood abandonment and his sexuality manifest in his work. Against a tendency toward autobiographical self-expression, however, Vivier would deploy these figures according to a more complex approach to musical and literary composition, which would intrude upon and displace the autobiographical as such, chronicling instead the loss of this primary condition for self-expression. Vivier’s sexuality and his childhood abandonment are thus not ever explicitly expressed by his music, but instead come to corrupt the very conditions of possibility of their expression. In this sense, one might say, Vivier’s personal search for purity and origin ultimately culminated in musical configurations of a kind of death, and not only his own—a death, rather, that is always already inscribed within life, for which his music provides only and necessarily the hollow consolations of fairy tales no longer able to be believed, addressed to the children that we never were.

Postscript.

Each of these chapters presents a different moment, in the history of opera and literature, when a metaphysics of expression finds degradation and loss at its origin—when the Orphic voice becomes an echo, a “voice of nothing.” In the eighteenth century, Rousseau had analyzed such a corruption in his theory of melody and language; for Wagner and Mallarmé in the nineteenth century, it was a question of responding to the decay or displacement of a total work of art; in the twentieth century, Schoenberg struggled with the deterioration of a divine idea, and Vivier dramatized the failure of his own perpetual search for an uncorrupted origin. Each of these thinkers and/or artists began by searching for purity and immediacy in their concept of expression; yet, and precisely through the *ruthlessness* with which they pursued this purity, they arrived instead at the recognition of an “originary corruption” (Bennington, “Aesthetics Interrupted” 21). Absolute purity being a void, corruption thus becomes the *sine qua non* of expression: this was a lesson first learned by those who most vehemently fought against it. Only by ignoring this lesson can art today lay claim to the authentic or the immediate, though it becomes all the more kitsch for doing so. To think art after deconstruction, then, is to unravel the tendency to *figure* expression in these terms—and to move thus from the final reassurances of a closing cadence to what remains, fundamentally, decadence:

*So for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I have lost the earth
and the flowers of the earth,
and the live souls above the earth,
and you who passed across the light
and reached
ruthless;

you who have your own light,
who are to yourself a presence,*

who need no presence;

*yet for all your arrogance
and your glance,
I tell you this:*

*such loss is no loss,
such terror, such coils and strands and pitfalls
of blackness,
such terror
is no loss;*³⁹³

³⁹³ H.D., from "Eurydice."

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